EVANUS

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Evanus:

A Tale of the Days of Constantine.

BY THE
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John Harvey Treat.

PREFACE.

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THE kind reception which the earlier production of the author* met with from the public, has encouraged him to commit another of his tales to the press.

Its object has been to describe the leading events attending the great change which made Christianity the national religion of the Roman empire, and put a period to the age of persecutions, the crisis of the tale being that battle near the Milvian Bridge which sealed the fate of Paganism.

The author is perfectly aware that the character given to Constantine by Gibbon, and writers of his school, differs greatly from that with which he himself has endeavoured to invest him in the pages of the tale, but he pleads, in defence, that, since all the Pagan writers of the period naturally painted Constantine in the darkest hues, and the Christian authors in the brightest, he is quite justified in placing himself in union with the latter.

From similar motives, he has not hesitated to introduce those semi-miraculous events into the narrative, which are found in the works of Eusebius and other ecclesiastical authors.

It has been the most earnest wish of the author, to paint a truthful description of the state of Britain and of the Roman world at the period in question; and he trusts that in the Notes forming the appendix, sufficient evidence will be found to justify the high state of civilization he has ascribed to our Celtic predecessors; much more might easily be adduced.

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* "Æmilius, a tale of the Decian and Valerian persecutions."

It has been a labour of love to the author to describe the scenery around Durocina, for it was the locality in which the years of his boyhood were spent.

Sitting, in bygone years, upon the slopes of the Little Wittenham hills (the ancient Sinnodunum or Synodune), gazing upon Dorchester as it lay before him, and musing upon the appearance it might have presented in ancient days, he conceived an intense desire to restore the hues of life to the past,—to summon the days of Roman glory before the eye of the mind, and reanimate the long buried generations who then occupied our island home.

He feels keenly how inadequate the performance of the task has been to the desire he entertained, while he must gratefully acknowledge his obligation to the Vicar of Dorchester, of whose valuable antiquarian notes he has largely availed himself.

He dedicates this little tale to the revered memory of one who dwelt in the vicarage which occupies the spot assigned in the tale to the villa of Helena, of whose flock it was his privilege to be a member in his early years, and who yet lives in the loving recollections of his people, although many years have passed since the Easter Eve when he was committed to his tomb, on the spot where the tale records the burial of Aithne.

EVANUS:

A Tale of the Days of Constantine.

CHAPTER I.

The Village.

IT was evening, and the setting sun was casting his departing beams upon the mountains and forests, lakes and rivers, which diversified the wild fastnesses of the Grampians. Far above, the rocky peak of a lofty hill reddened in the evening light, while beneath the mighty shadow of the lower heights, twilight already veiled the outlines of a Caledonian village.

Huts rudely erected, formed of the timber of the forest, their interstices daubed over with clay, were placed so as to form circles around a central space, which was wholly unoccupied, save by a large flat stone, which formed the centre around which, the circles of houses, a huge mound constructed of timber and earth, and the outer ditch made concentric rings.

Far away, dimly seen in the twilight, stretched the deep and solemn forest, *here* clothing the sides of the neighbouring acclivities with dense verdure, *there* luxuriating in the fertile soil of the plain. Beneath the canopy of leaves, bare of undergrowth, the beast of the forest roved in peace, while the night wind sighed amongst the upper branches.

The clearing which the village occupied was one of nature's formation, it stretched mile after mile in length towards the deep channel of a mountain stream, but its breadth was barely a mile, and on each side the boundless forests of pine veiled the earth from the sky.

A boy stood alone on the plain, afar from the gates of the village,—the murmur of its inhabitants reached his ears unheeded, softened as it was by the distance into a faint sound, which mingled with the melodious rushing of a streamlet through a neighbouring glen; the gaze of the youth was rivetted on the dark lines of the forest, growing each minute darker and darker as the light of day slowly faded,—while on the peak above him, the darkness ascended, and the light retreated towards the summit, which yet glowed with the intensity of heated iron in the departing rays.

He was evidently returning from the chase; a bow and arrows were slung across his shoulders, and in addition he bore a string of game, the result of a successful day's sport.

But it would have been impossible for any person skilled in physiognomy, to have looked upon him without interest; his form might have served as a model for the Grecian Achilles,—although as yet imperfectly developed,—while the fearless glances of his eye, and the boldness of his mien, testified the native daring of the son of a Caledonian chieftain—such as one would have imagined Galgacus in his youth.

Yet there was an expression tempering this look of fierceness and daring, which spoke of softer feelings, and seemed to tell of the power love might exert over the young Celt.

Leggings and mocassins of hardened skin secured the feet from the thorns of the forest, and with a hunting dress of linen, probably the results of some successful foray into the haunts of civilization, formed the only dress of this child of nature.

Thus he stood straining his gaze towards the forest, as though his attention had been attracted by sounds issuing thence.

There was no longer room for doubt as to their nature, the night wind as it sighed over the forest, bore upon its wings a loud shout of joy and triumph from a hundred throats.

The boy's face flushed, and a look of joy lighted up his features; he gazed until dark shadows issuing forth from the woods, took the form of armed men, who beat their swords upon their shields, and raised their voices in shouts of joy and victory, while roused by the sound the women and children of the village thronged forth to meet their husbands and fathers.

The wild band of Caledonian warriors,—a band of such patriots as in the fastnesses of these mighty hills, yet bid defiance, at the opening of the fourth century, to the mighty power of Rome, against which they waged unintermitting warfare,—drew nearer and nearer.

First came fifty or sixty light armed warriors, whose bodies were stained hideously with woad, and whose faces were disfigured by the same ghastly war paint. And after them came a dozen older warriors surrounding a captive whose arms were bound tightly behind him.

The captive was of a far different lineage and race from his captors; no one who gazed for one moment upon the dark flashing eye, the embrowned features, the aquiline nose, the commanding form and gait, would have hesitated to proclaim him one of the world's conquerors, one whose boast was summed up in the proud words, "Civis Romanus sum."

Alas; he had little occasion now for boasting; the fierce and exulting looks which his captors from time to time threw upon him, proclaimed the extremity of his danger,—as his stained breastplate and broken helmet, spoke of heroic but unavailing resistance.

The boy gazed, like the rest fiercely, yet the calm dignity of the prisoner appeared to affect him and to hush the taunting words which seemed about to rise to his lips, as they echoed from the lips of all around him, old and young, man and woman, boy and girl, who gazed upon their living prey.

Immediately behind the group, surrounding the prisoner, came the chief, around whom a dozen of the bravest warriors, formed a guard of honour.

He was a man of fifty or sixty summers, yet seemingly still in the prime of life,—one whose name was whispered with bated breath in the nearest military stations of Roman Britain,—one whose proud boast was, that he was a descendant of that Galgacus, who had bidden defiance to Agricola and his legions, and who, faithful to the traditions of his house, had never yet bowed before the Roman Eagle.

It had been a resistance as heroic as unavailing from the days of that mighty conqueror to those of which we write. Step by step the conquering sons of Rome had advanced, while the petty kingdoms of Britain fell one after the other under their sway, and the inhabitants, save a few daring spirits, became their obedient vassals. Under Plautius and Vespasian the provinces south of the Thames became Roman territory; under Ostorius the temporary boundary upon the north became the Tyne; but under Agricola, Roman

Britain was extended to the Firths of the Forth and Clyde, while even beyond that line of defence the heroic Galgacus, (the ancestor of our chieftain,) had yielded to the matchless discipline of the legions, on that fatal day when, as Tacitus tells us, hundreds of the Caledonians, despairing of their country, slew their wives and children, after tears and tender embraces, that they might not become Roman slaves.

Yet Caledonia was never retained by the conquerors, although the fleet of Agricola circumnavigated the island, and the Roman mariners were astounded by the dark and solemn scenery of the northern and western coasts.

Long after the death of this great Roman, Severus penetrated the narrow promontory which separates the Murray and Cromarty Firths, and marked with astonishment the lengthened summer day, and the shortened night, but no Roman army ever followed his steps, and the territory between the Tyne and the Forth was ever, as in the time of our tale, "The Debatable Land."

But we must return from our digression. The chieftain had reached the spot where the boy stood eagerly searching the ranks of the passing warriors with his keen eye, when the composed demeanour of the former met an unexpected interruption, as the latter broke impetuously through the body guard, embraced him fervently, and thanked the gods, who had restored his father, unhurt, by the chances of combat.

One moment only did the chieftain yield to the softer feelings, "Eachan, my son," he said as he fondly but firmly ended the caress of his child, "you forget that you are a warrior's boy, and will soon be called upon to be a warrior yourself; caresses and embraces are for children."

"Then, father, if I may not act as a child, why will you not take me with you to the battle? I am neither boy nor man in your estimation."

The chieftain gazed indulgently upon his only son, and suffered him to walk by his side as amidst the joyful cries of the multitude they entered the village.

Arrived at the central spot spoken of, the whole band paused, and formed a circle around the flat stone described, leaving within them a space of considerable diameter.

By the side of the stone stood a venerable figure, an aged man, with hair and beard perfectly white and unshorn descending even to his waist; he was clad in a long white robe, which descended to the ground and was unfastened by loop or girdle.

"My children," he said, amidst solemn silence, "how have the gods prospered you?"

"We have ravaged the country our foemen occupy, with fire and sword, even within sight of their tents; we have slain their young men, and left behind us a desert. They pursued us with a chosen band, even to the defiles of our mountain land, and turning upon them, as a bear turns upon pursuing dogs, we have destroyed or scattered our pursuers, and lo! their chieftain, a prisoner, awaits the will of the gods."

"Place him in the midst," was the reply.

The prisoner was led into the open space in the centre of his foes, and the Druid gazed upon him with stern features, while every tongue was hushed, and the whole assemblage waited in expectant silence.

"Of what lineage art thou?" asked the priest.

"Of the lineage of thy conquerors,—a Roman."

Shouts of rage and derision rent the air, which were hushed by the uplifted hand of the Druid.

"Silence, my children," he said, when they stood mute before this expression of his will; "of what avail are the idle words of a captive; he will change his tone when the flames rise around him, for he is the victim whom the gods have foretold unto me in the visions of the night."

"Listen, my sons; I dreamt and behold I saw the hosts of our foes, but they seemed as men without souls to my gaze, and their wills were simply bent in abject submission to the will of their leader, in whose life they lived, and at whose death they would disperse as chaff before the blast. 'See,' said a voice, 'the great enemy of thy gods;

one who living will crush thee, dead will, by his death, bring to thee and thine victory; await him on the morrow.' I have awaited him, and lo, he is here. Therefore, to-morrow let the fire be kindled to salute the rising sun, and while the flames arise let his spirit pass from the earth to the shades below, so shall peace and security be ours."

A loud shout of joy rent the air, amidst which the assemblage broke up, and two stout men led the victim, still seemingly unmoved, to a hut near the centre of the village, within which he was now confined, while the sentinels watched before the door.

Meanwhile the whole village was abandoned to merriment and to excess; intoxicating liquors, such as the natives extracted from honey or the fruits of the earth, circulated freely; songs arose around the fires kindled in the open air; oxen and sheep were slaughtered, with multitudes of lesser victims, and feasting and mirth broke the silence of the night.

CHAPTER II.

The Chieftain's Home.

THERE were two authorities who claimed jurisdiction over the rude people of this Grampian village, a greater and a lesser; the greater, Broichan, the Arch-druid; the lesser, Aëdh the brave, the hereditary chieftain of the tribe, the descendant of that heroic Galgacus of whom mention has already been made.

Never in the annals of history has a superstition exercised more relentless sway over the lives of a people, than that of which the Druids were the ministrants. Their power, if not always superior to the civil power, was never in subjection to it. They administered the laws, affixing the rewards or penalties; they educated the youth in their mysterious lore; they determined, as judges, disputes arising between private individuals; but in every case they enforced obedience to their decision by the severest religious penalties. The power of excommunication, which they used with great severity, was a punishment equivalent to

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See Note A.

social death, interdicted from the sacrifices the victim was held accursed, no one would salute him, none dared to give him food. Even in the depth of those fearful winters so common in that age, he was denied the use of fire and light, and the natural termination of such a sentence was a death of lingering agony.

And in these wilds of the Grampians, Druidism, exiled from Southern Britain by the Roman arms, found its last home; here its fierce teachings were drunk in with delight, as identified with the spirit of patriotism itself; here human victims offered in cruel sacrifice were still frequently immolated; here to be a Christian or to forsake the national worship, was to be false to one's country, and to choose, so said the Druids, the life, and also the death of a traitor.

Near at hand was the principal seat of Scottish Druidism where the Archdruid commonly resided, surrounded by the three orders of brethren,—the Druids, who were frequently of lofty genius, and addressed themselves to occult and hidden philosophy: the Vates, who acted as priests and soothsayers, foretelling the future, frequently by the inspection of human nerve and fibre, during the dying struggles of their victims, when they would in such cases, slay by a single stroke of the sword, that they might thus watch the convulsions of the quivering limbs, and the direction in which the blood flowed from the body. Then there were the Bards who made and sang the national songs by which they stirred up the people to heroic resistance against Rome, promising to the brave the immortality of the soul in realms of bliss, and threatening to the coward an existence of shame and disgrace through the transmigration of the soul to the form of some degraded slave or even of some lower animal.

But the chieftain Aëdh, surnamed the Brave, the father of our hero, was one whose influence over his tribe would have been boundless, if not overshadowed by this mightier and darker power. Victory after victory had he gained over the invader in the mountainous passes leading to his retreat, through a singular combination of courage and strategy; long had the Romans honoured him by setting a price upon his head, and yet he lived and moved a free and independent chieftain.

But the impatient Romans, unaccustomed to defeat, were now concentrating their forces upon the Forth, and it was rumoured that the warlike son of the Roman governor, or Cæsar, had returned from the far east, and after his arrival in Britain had been despatched by his father to repel the Caledonian incursions. A body of Romans had been despatched, they said by his order, to occupy the entrance of the pass communicating with the plain, and the result has been already placed before the reader.

The home of the chieftain was far superior in its construction to the majority of the huts of the village, possessing the unusual luxury of two rooms, one devoted to the hours of sleep, another to the ordinary occupations of the day.

It was carpeted throughout by the softest moss, while the wooden walls, plastered with clay to exclude the wind, were covered by tapestry, the result of some successful foray.

The furniture was strangely assorted: articles of feminine luxury, betraying the presence of some woman reared in the haunts of civilization, contrasted oddly with the shield and spear, the broad sword and target suspended above.

Aithne, the chieftain's bride, was seated on a couch coustructed rudely of native wood, but adorned with Tyrian purple, and surmounted by cushions of the softest material.

She was so unlike the rude race around her, that the fact would have been readily conjectured that she had been a captive before she ruled in the chieftain's home, who from her conqueror had become her protector.

An expression of tender melancholy, resigned yet sad, reigned upon her face, and spoke from her lustrous eyes; but yet the gazer would have had small difficulty in recognising the mother of Eachan.

She seemed ill at ease; and her hands were frequently raised to her ears, or her face hidden in the coverings of her couch, as the fierce yells of the warriors without broke on her solitude. Once indeed, she ventured to gaze upon the scene, but quickly closed the door and resumed her former position.

At last the door was abruptly opened, and Eachan, her son, entered, his face flushed, his eyes sparkling, and every movement of his flexible frame showing the excitement under which he laboured.

"Oh! mother," he exclaimed, "have you not heard father has returned victorious?"

"God be praised," was the reply.

"Yes; and they have had such a glorious time of it. They have driven the foe back unto their tents, and spoiled the country before their faces with fire and sword, and their leader has been taken prisoner."

"Do not tell me anything more about it, my boy, you know these sad scenes are painful to me."

"But why should they be so, mother? are not these Romans the foes of our country? we should not hurt them if they stayed in Rome, we should not go there to ravage their country, then why should they come here; I think this prisoner really deserves to die?"

Her colour came and went, she seemed scarcely able to articulate, and he continued, "Oh! I forgot, you cannot bear the Druids. I will not tell you more then, and not even mention the word 'fire.'"

The expression of pain which crossed her features sobered even the reckless boy, who really loved his mother; he came and threw his arms around her neck, she seemed to be making a violent effort at self-restraint, and at last, partially succeeding, thus addressed him,

"Eachan, my dear child, sit by my side, I wish to speak with you." Seating himself he listened attentively, and she began,

"You know, my boy, I was not always a dweller as now, in the wilderness; my youth was spent far away amongst those of our race, who have embraced the civilization of Rome, while they have submitted to her arms."

"The cowards," he interrupted, but she heeded not.

"And in *that*, my early youth, there was a family of the conquering race, justly dear to me; our villas adjoined, and the two families lived almost as one, theirs was the protecting, ours the protected, for they were of the imperial race, and their authority great in Britain.

"It is little avail to tell how in hours of deep trial they were a succour and defence to us, how in a time when our little all was shipwrecked by the adverse waves of fortune, their resources were ours, and the tide of adversity by their aid surmounted. I speak of days long gone by.

"My father and mother died early, and I became the adopted child of our protectors.

"But there was one deeply connected by ties of blood with their household, one of my own age, an ardent boy, whose young soul was unstained by aught that could sully its purity; we were as brother and sister, until that day when he was summoned to the far east to learn the art of war under the far-famed Cæsar of the east, Galerius. We parted with many tears, and many aspirations for the future, fondly hoping to meet again. But God had otherwise ordained. Our home lay beyond the northern boundary of safety, which was then the Tyne; we lived on the Tweed, but we feared no danger, for the fierce Caledonians had long been pent within these mountain fastnesses.

"But a day of sadness and horror came upon us, a fierce incursion of barbarians swept the lowlands, our villa became their prey, and I was saved from fire and sword to become thy mother.

"And now, my Eachan, I have seen once more the friend of my childhood, the companion of my youth; he is a captive, and fated to die by fire."

The boy looked up into her face. "Mother, dear mother, I know all you would say; be assured, if he can be saved he shall be."

"You know, my boy," she continued, "with what detestation and horror I have ever regarded these human sacrifices, but that he"—

She could add no more, her grief found vent in tears, when the door opened, and her husband, the chieftain, appeared. He seemed to comprehend her distress, and his reproachful glance said, "Eachan, why did you let her know?"

Joyfully did she greet his return, for he had ever been a protector, and a kind husband, but her joy was now overclouded by tears and sadness.

"Thou seemest but sad my Aithne," said the warrior as he supported the drooping form on his bosom, "have the yells of the warriors frightened thee, my timid one?"

She looked into his face, her eyes filled with tears, her imploring gaze more eloquent than her words.

"My beloved one," he replied to the mute appeal, "I cannot help it—the gods know that I ever prefer the clash of weapons, and the fierce war shout, to the drums and trumpets which resound around the pile where the flames consume our foes, but I am but the first man of my tribe, and cannot change their custom; these priests will have it so, and the power of the descendant of Galgacus must bow before them."

"But you are chieftain, father; can you not do as you please? shall I go and bid them release the captive?" said young Eachan.

"Foolish boy," said his father, "are you, too, without comprehension? do you not know the power of the interpreters of the will of the gods? it is well that your words are spoken in the secrecy of night, beneath your father's roof; we can but forget all this and enjoy the present. I will not join the feast without, we will sup together."

Preparations were made by slaves for a banquet, for slavery was not an institution peculiar to Rome; the board groaned beneath all that the forest, the air, or the flood could supply. Venison, game, and fish, cakes of wheat baked between hot stones or on the glowing embers, with preparations of milk and the fruits of the wilds completed the hospitable array, and conversation was for a time hushed beneath the claims of appetite.

The supper over, husband and wife conversed fondly together, for the beautiful Aithne could not be insensible to the forbearing love which had protected her since her long captivity began; a love which had taken away all the bitterness of that captivity, save in one respect. Aithne was a Christian, and save when by stealth, some wandering mission priest, taking his life in his hand, sought the hill country, to gather in the flock of his master, she had been utterly separated from *all* that her faith had taught her to hold dear.

In that faith she had striven, but in vain, to rear the young Eachan; he would sit when very young upon her knee, and listen to her tales of the Lord Christ with intense interest; and an hour afterwards, he would sit beneath the feet of some aged harper, who sang of war and battles, of vengeance upon the Roman foe, and of the glory of freedom. The fiery spirit of his race kindled within the little breast, and his mother's plaintive stories lost their power for the time.

And the chieftain, although he tolerated his wife's faith, yet was forced to enjoin the utmost secrecy respecting it, lest even his power should fail to screen her from the hatred of the Druids.

But no thought of danger from the stern priesthood was present to the mind of our chieftain in this *first* night of his return, and the *last*, although he knew it not, of the joys of home.

Night passed on, the song and shout had ceased to issue from the village, and to reverberate through the arches of the forest; the glare of the numerous fires was sinking into a dull red hue, the distant howl of the wolf occasionally reached the ears of the sentinel in his post, or, borne upon the night wind, penetrated the home where the descendant of Galgacus, his wife and child, slept in peace and safety.

CHAPTER III.

The Captive.

DARKNESS visited the face of the earth, and silence was supreme in the village, men, women, and children were forgetting the excitement and toil of the day, in the sweet oblivion of sleep, when the door of the chieftain's hut opened gently, and Eachan issued forth.

The fires which blazed with so brilliant a lustre in the earlier part of the evening, had utterly subsided into dull red embers, around which the Celtic warriors and their dogs lay, in many instances, buried in sleep.

Treading with a light footstep amongst them, hiding within the shadows, passed the boy, with a look of unusual determination upon his features, yet with a caution which sufficiently spoke his sense of the danger of his mission.

At last he reached the hut which contained the captive and glanced around him; before the door stood the two sentinels motionless as statues, but seemingly undisturbed by the soft footfall of the son of their chief, who crept like a snake behind the hut, and lay there in silence for a few moments.

He could distinctly hear the breathing of the captive whom he had come to deliver, for, touched by his mother's suppressed agony, and by the helplessness of his father in the emergency, he had determined to take a step so bold, that had he fully known its extreme danger, he might yet have hesitated.

The walls of the hut were but of timber loosely put together, but the safety of the captive did not depend upon them; the ligatures which bound his hands and feet, and secured him to a strong post, driven into the soil beneath the hut, were the means of his safe detention.

Hence Eachan knew that if he could but loosen one of the outer planks, he could easily free the prisoner by cutting his bonds, and one of the planks was loose. Silently he dislodged it from its position, and although he started when it finally yielded with some little noise, yet the sentinels were so drowsy with the day's exertion, and the good cheer which had succeeded it, that they heeded not, and Eachan crept into the hut, and stood before the prisoner, uttering in a low whisper the words, "Be silent as you would be saved, I am a friend."

One after another he severed the ligatures, but even then the captive was unable to move, and, but for the support the boy afforded him, would have sunk to the ground; he had been tied so cruelly that the circulation of the blood had been impeded, and it was some minutes before he had the use of his limbs. With little difficulty the heroic boy made him comprehend the means by which the hut must be left, and, following his preserver, the Roman soon stood in safety in the open air. The sentinels were probably asleep, at least they gave no alarm, and Eachan led the way towards the mound surrounding the village. They stepped over prostrate forms which gave evidence of the power of sleep and the vigour of the nasal organs, and at length reached the outer mound, where was a practicable outlet for escape, well known to the boys of the village who had often before this left by those means to scour the neighbouring hills and woods.

Still preserving utter silence, hardly knowing whether he was not dreaming, the captive followed his preserver; they plunged into a thick copse wood and ascended gently rising ground, until they stood upon a level sward of some acres in extent.

It was a grove surrounded with ancient trees, which had outgrown their usual altitude, and even in mid-day shut out the view of heaven with their intervening and intertwining boughs.

The vast height of the wood, the retired secrecy of the place, the wonder and awe inspired by so dense a gloom, were not without their effect even in the day time, but in the solemn night season, when the midnight breeze made plaintive music in their upper boughs, and when, as now, the rising moon cast chequered shadows upon the verdant turf, the conviction of a present deity, or of unseen yet real inhabitants of the solitude, was impressed deeply upon the soul.

But there was an occupant of the grove.

The beams of the rising moon gradually brought to light an awful face, surmounting a huge image of wicker-work of great proportions. The lower limbs were formed to represent drapery, and in the folds was placed a door giving admittance to the interior; the arms were crossed before the breast, and the face so hideously painted, that the very presence of the image, seemed like that of some malignant being.

"Why have you brought me here?" asked the captive, starting back in alarm.

"It is but the wicker image; beyond this grove lies the path to safety, you do not fear the lifeless thing?"

"Fear it, no; yet its very figure is such as only demons could devise; why hast thou delivered me from this fate, what claim have I on thee?"

"None; but somewhat on my mother."

"Thy mother!"

"Hush," said the boy, "be silent, you are not yet in safety."

Brave as was the Roman, he could not repress a shudder, at the thought of the doom reserved for him, from which he seemed so unexpectedly delivered; but he followed silently the guidance of his deliverer, until they came abruptly upon the brink of a precipice.

Above them, yet frowned the giant bastions of the mountains, but far below was a deep valley, through which a mountain stream with musical sound found its course, leaping from rock to rock, glistening like silver as the wavelets caught the moonbeams, and passing again into the blankness of the dark shadow of copse, rock, and tree.

The warrior immediately comprehended from his general knowledge of the country that the brook would be his guide to liberty, for imperfect plans of the district were in the hands of his ubiquitous countrymen; but how could he descend to its level, for the precipice yawned before him, one sheer perpendicular wall of several hundreds of feet in height? and he gazed in vain for a means of making the descent.

"If I deliver thee," said the boy, "thou must promise never to use the knowledge thou wilt acquire, to the injury of my people."

"It were ungrateful not to promise," was the reply, "I pledge thee a soldier's word."

"Follow me then, carefully."

The boy caught hold of the branches of a willow and lowered himself to a ledge about two feet in width, on the face of the precipice, which had been hidden by projecting underwood from the eyes of the other, who at once dropped likewise and followed. The ledge extended in a downward direction along the face of the rock, sometimes broad, sometimes so narrow that the danger was great, but at length they reached a channel formed by a mountain streamlet, where dwarf oak and bushes formed a precarious lodgment in the slopes leading down to the valley beneath.

Here the boy paused and addressed his companion. "Thou mayst follow the bed of this stream in safety till it joins the brook, after which thy course is easy; cross the brook at once, it will not be fordable below, and after a walk of a few miles down its left bank thou wilt reach the pass."

"But how can I thank thee, who hast delivered me from such a death; what reward dost thou ask?"

"None; I am the child of a native warrior, and can take no reward from a Roman, but thou wert the early playmate of my mother, and for the sake of her tears I have delivered thee, when even my father's power could not have stepped between the Druids and their victim."

"But thy mother, her name, and lineage?"

"I cannot tell thee more, she is the wife of a great chieftain, and lost to thee for ever, but thou hast been her protector in adversity, and now hast thy reward. Ask no further questions."

"But at least allow me to assure you of my protection in——"

The boy interrupted almost fiercely.

"A son of Galgacus needs no protection, save that of his father's sword."

"Yet my countrymen are powerful, and the chances of war many; at least, accept this ring, it will perhaps bring thee deliverance when thou needest it; and if not for thy own sake, accept it for thy mother's."

"Nor for *her* sake will I accept it; only, Roman, be merciful for her sake to the Picts who, as captives, may fall into thy hands."

"I swear it for her sake and thine."

"Farewell," said the boy, "we meet no more."

As he spoke he vanished amongst the foliage, and the delivered Roman pursued his course with all the energy his situation needed.

"Who can he be?" he said to himself, "Who can his mother be? his father must be the chieftain who has baffled us so long; but his mother, to whom I am indebted for my life, can it be, can it be the long lost Lucia; oh, companion of my youth, lost never perhaps to return, art thou my deliverer?"

Meanwhile Eachan ascended the hill and was passing the sacred grove which contained the wicker image, when he heard a step and concealed himself in alarm.

A figure clothed from head to foot in white stood before the image, from the doorway in whose base it had emerged. Eachan knew the form too well, it was that of the Archdruid.

For a moment the limbs of the boy shook beneath him, and he trembled with awe, for to him the power and wisdom of the Druid had something supernatural in it, and he almost credited the stern priesthood with miraculous powers. But he lay hidden, and through an opening in the bushes watched this awful foe.

The Druid approached, evidently intending to return to the village, by a path leading near Eachan. When so close by the boy, that he might almost have touched him, he paused, and looked steadfastly into the dark shadow of the bushes.

Did he see the crouching figure, or did he not? At all events, his hesitation was a short one, he resumed his path and disappeared.

When the echo of his footsteps had died away, Eachan rose and followed, till turning aside from the path of the Druid he reached the opening in the mound by which he had left the village; he passed it in safety, and crept amongst the houses till he reached the door of his home; he opened it gently, and heard the deep breathing of sleep from the curtained recess, where his father and mother reposed; he threw himself upon his own little couch of skins and slept.

The moonlight silvered the outlines of mountain and valley, and lit the path of the rescued captive as he swiftly descended the valley, following the guidance of the stream. Once he turned and listened, but no sound, save the murmur of the waters, or the cry of the night-bird, broke the silence of the night.

At length the pass was reached between two massive and precipitous heights, and beyond this natural gateway the open country lay before him, with the tents of his countrymen, the moonbeams bringing their outlines into vivid prominence. The solitary cry of the sentinel, piercing the distance, fell upon his ears. He was saved.

CHAPTER IV.

THE dawn had arisen, and the summit of the hills were reddening in the returning sunlight; here and there mists collected in the hollows, waiting the bidding of the great luminary to disperse; the birds, awakening, sang their sweet songs of life and gladness, while, as yet, no sign of the awakening of man was visible, and no thread of smoke defiled the sweet freshness of the morning breeze.

But this tranquility was not fated to endure long. Two or three warriors, like men suddenly roused from sleep, came with hasty tread to the chieftain's lodge, and awoke the household by repeated blows upon the door. Eachan, but half awake, sat upon his couch, but his father was already at the door, and, receiving from the visitors the startling information of the escape of the prisoner, disappeared in their company.

The news was rapidly spreading; men who had slept in the open air were already on their feet, standing together in groups, to discuss the singular event; three or four active young men, attended by huge, gaunt dogs, were leaving the gates of the village to disperse themselves over the plain; the leading warriors were rapidly assembling to take council; the women and children next appeared, discussing with louder tongues the treachery which they saw must have been wrought in their midst; but all were utterly puzzled, and none could ever find the remotest clue to the mysterious disappearance of the intended victim. They knew that his bonds, severed by a sharp knife, lay on the floor of his prison, and that a plank was loose in the wall: that was all.

The gladness which had overspread the features of Aithne, when the escape of the captive was announced yielded to a look of apprehension as she learned from her son the mode and manner of his escape. She was perfectly aware that even the power of his father might fail to save her boy from the hostility of the Druids, and that the deed he had performed in his fidelity to his love of his mother was one which would be looked upon as an act of unmitigated treachery by the nation. Then there was the distinct teaching of the Druids, that a life could only be saved by a life, or that one delivered from death must compensate the dark deities by a life yielded to them in return, and she could not doubt how Druidical wisdom would apply this sentiment.

Unhappy mother, apprehensive so lately for the friend of her youth, the apprehension was now one of poignant anguish for the safety of her son. He too had his fears, now that the excitement of the deed was over, and even had his doubts whether he had not acted treacherously towards his people, neither could he forget the manner in which the Druid Broichan had passed near the place of his concealment the night before.

Mid-day, and still no tidings had been received of the prisoner; some of his pursuers had returned, footsore and spent with travel, reporting that the dogs had once found a scent at the brook, and immediately lost it again.

It was May-day, and a singular custom was annually observed on the recurrence of the festival. All the domestic fires in the country were extinguished, to be lighted again the next day from the sacred fire used for the purposes of sacrifice, and always kept burning by the Druids upon the Cromlech, a flat stone forming the centre of the temple, or enclosure of upright stones.

And on this day the whole population of the village had been previously warned to assemble at mid-day in the grove above the village, their fires being previously extinguished, and the head of each household bearing a torch whereby to convey the sacred flame to his own dwelling.

It was generally an occasion of joyous mirth, but this day, so great was the confusion attending the escape of the prisoner, so intense the fear of the wrath of the Druids, that the people assembled in silence.

It was very hot, the day was cloudless; the leaves as yet but beginning to appear upon the oaks, formed but an insufficient protection from the noon-day beams.

In the centre of the grove was the Cromlech, before described, surrounded by the circle of large upright stones, and upon its flat surface the sacred fire burnt; beyond, terminating the scene, stood the ghastly wicker image.

All was silent, when the Archdruid, preceded by his assistants, men, like himself, of hoary age, emerged from a leafy recess, and made their way through the crowd to the centre of the cricle, which was absolutely void of occupants save the priestly forms.

Standing erect before the fire which glittered on the stone, the stern priest spoke.

"The gods are angry, and deny the genial gift of fire to the inhabitants of this village, until they have purged themselves of guilt."

All eyes were turned upon Aëdh, their chieftain, who, as the representative of the laity, was bound to reply.

"We know," he said, in a firm but sad voice, "that treachery has been in our midst; but our young men already are on the track of the fugitive, and the gods may yet receive their victim."

"They will return with their hands empty," replied the Druid; "already the destined victim is with his people, and their hands will be strong against the children of the soil, unless the angry deities are appeased."

"But how, my Father, may we appease them?"

"By giving life for life; he, who deprived the deities of their victim, must die by fire in that victim's stead."

"Who is he, Father, that we may secure him?"

"Thou shalt learn forthwith; but, firstly, let the people hear. Do ye, my children, abhor this evil wrought among you?"

"We do," was the universal answer.

"Then do ye bind yourselves to deliver to the avenging deities the criminal to die by fire whosoever he may be?"

"We do."

"Raise then your hands, in token that ye imprecate the wrath of the gods upon him, and in testimony of your own innocence."

All hands, save one, were raised amidst dread silence.

"It is well; the gods will decide; let the representatives of the households stand forth."

The heads of the different families separated themselves from the crowd, and came within the circle of stones; the Archdruid bound a wreath of mistletoe round his head, and, standing over the sacred fire, solemnly invoked the aid of the gods.

"Let lots be taken; the gods will decide in whose family this crime has been wrought."

In a leathern receptacle pebbles were placed, equalling the number of families, all white save one. Then, one after another, the warriors prepared to draw; but only one drew. Aëdh, drawing first, to his horror exhibited the black pebble. There was a universal cry of horror.

"Swear," said the Druid, "by this sacred fire, that thou art innocent."

"Nay, nay," said a youthful voice, as the unhappy Eachan broke into the group, "it was I; he knew nothing of it."

He stood before the altar, the perspiration breaking into huge drops upon his forehead, yet determination was written upon his brow.

"It is well," said the Druid. "Aëdh, thou hast sworn, as have the others, to yield the victim to the will of the gods."

Choked by emotion, yet half incredulous, doubting whether his ears had heard aright, the father interposed:

"There must be some dread mistake. Eachan, thou hast never lied to me; couldst thou, didst thou, do this deed?"

"Alas, father, I did."

The unhappy chieftain turned to the altar, and silently bowed his head in token of submission.

Even the hard heart of Broichan seemed moved for one brief instant, but never did he falter in his purpose, nor, perhaps, was it possible.

"Chieftain," he said, "thou art of a race of heroes; thou art a man, and must endure. Take thy son home with thee till the hour before sunset; when the luminary departs, the wicker image must have its tenant, and the flame be kindled which shall purify thy household."

A lane was formed in the crowd, and the chieftain, striving to suppress his emotion, led his son to take his last long leave of home and all dear to him.

It would be as painful as unnecessary to paint the distress of the succeeding hours; to tell how Aithne, the unhappy mother, passed from swoon to swoon; to tell how the stern chieftain strove in vain to repress his emotion, but utterly failed; to tell how the fated boy was, perhaps, the least sufferer in the little group; how he strove to reconcile himself to the fate before him, and for his parents' sake to seem oblivious of the coming agony, or, at least, submissive to the will of the gods. All this we may leave to the imagination of our readers; these are scenes "better imagined than described," hackneyed though the phrase may be.

But the inexorable hours rolled on, the shadows lengthened, the sun drew near his setting, the living mass again peopled the grove, the very sentinels posted towards the haunts of the Roman foe, forgot their duties in the excitement of the hour, and the whole tribe was collected in front of the dread circle.

The sinking orb of day was already touching the topmost ridge of the western mountains, the highest summits were steeped in crimson light, when, amidst the compassionate silence of the multitude, compassionating not the victim but the father, Aëdh appeared, his face pale, but seemingly composed, leading his hapless son by the hand.

In the wicker image, which was now the object of universal interest, a door stood open, and a short ladder led to it from the ground; into that opening the ill-fated boy was to pass, and the closing door would for ever sever him from the gaze of his people.

Torches of pine lay on the Cromlech by the sacred fire, and three priests of the second order, their brows encircled by the mistletoe, stood prepared to fire the pile, the lower chamber being filled with inflammable materials.

Around the pile stood the Vates, or bards, bearing not simply harps, but drums, trumpets, and instruments of discordant music,—the prototype of the bagpipe,—whereby they might drown the cries of the victim as the flames arose.

Commonly, not one but many victims perished in these fierce acts of sacrifice, but to-day, the want of other victims, the extremity of the danger to which the tribe was exposed, seemed to warrant an extraordinary appeal to their dark deities.

The victim stood within the circle, the father placed him before the Archdruid, and retired, heart-broken, within the crowd, hiding his face in the folds of his robe. Broichan had already raised his arms to pronounce the imprecation, whereby the victim was consigned to the infernal deities, his body to the flames, his soul to the shades below, when—

He paused, his eyes wandered from the victim, his gaze was rivetted upon the distant plain which through an opening in the grove was visible before him. The eyes of all present followed his gaze, and they beheld the radiance of the setting sun reflected upon shield and spear, sword and eagle, as the mighty warriors of Rome—the pass having been gained in the absence of its defenders—swept towards the village.

One universal cry, one common rush for safety; the weak were trampled under foot, the strong passed on unheeding; minutes, nay moments, were of the utmost importance, for the very gates of the village were unclosed. Aëdh, summoning by his war-cry a score of his bravest warriors, rushed to gain the gates, and die in defence of his people, if he could thus but gain them time. The Arch-druid and his satellites fled in dismay, and the captive, forgotten by all, stood alone in the awful circle.

One moment he paused, as if the faculties of his mind had been shaken by the scenes through which he had passed, he was alone. Yes, alone, and the woods might offer a secure refuge; but his heart was with his father and mother, and when he had collected his thoughts, he followed the throng like one in a dream.

CHAPTER V.

THE desperate nature of the approaching conflict was visible at a glance; the hosts of the Roman foe covered the face of the plain, and were advancing rapidly towards the village, the cavalry sweeping, like a cloud before the wind, over the flat surface, the infantry visible as a darker cloud in the rear. The great defence of the country was the mountainous pass through the glen, a mile or two below, and this would never have been left undefended, had not the chieftain been so engrossed by his domestic affliction, as to forget the more distant danger from his ever watchful foes.

The village itself was situated on a slight acclivity above the plain, although itself in turn beneath the grove of the Druids, and the slight ascent leading to the gates was commanded by the mound and rampart, from which missiles could be thrown with deadly effect against the ascending foe. Through these gates the women and children were now pouring in to seek the shelter of the walls, but so dense was the throng, that it was evident the cavalry of the foe would arrive before all were safely within the rampart.

To gain a few minutes of time, Aëdh, with a few chosen warriors, were prepared to sacrifice their lives, for amongst these primitive people the natural virtues flourished in a far higher degree than amongst their more civilized neighbours, and the love of their offspring was strong within them. They rapidly formed a line in front of the ascent leading to the gate, and with their huge spears presented a fearful barrier against the rush of the horses, beneath whose advance the ground seemed already to vibrate.

They were accustomed to fight with the target and broad sword, like their Fathers who had contended with Agricola, and like their descendants, the Highlanders of modern days, but in this emergency they relied chiefly upon their huge spears, with which they not unfrequently fought from their war chariots, or withstood the shock of cavalry themselves on foot.

Meanwhile a chosen band of warriors had sought their horses in the pastures adjacent to the village, for fondness for these animals, and skill in adapting them to warlike purposes, was common to the Celtic race.

But the Roman cavalry, their breastplates shining in the fast decaying light, their long Spanish swords glittering as they rode, were nearer than the Celtic horse, and, unless intercepted, would certainly cut off the retreat of a large portion of the women and children, as they hurried in from the grove, blocking up the road and hindering their own retreat.

Steadily their husbands and fathers formed into line, three deep, and with spears presented in a seemingly impenetrable mass, fronted the advancing foe.

Like some huge wave impelled by a mighty wind the legionaries surged onward. All cries were hushed in that dread moment of suspense, and in breathless silence they awaited the awful shock,—a silence broken only by the thunder of the horses' hoofs.

It came, the Romans had charged.

The horses, partially protected by defensive armour, and, like their riders, maddened by the excitement of the rush, had leaped at the barrier, and the cries of men, the shrieks of wounded horses, had followed the crash. It was a fearful scene; here and there the front was penetrated, but not by living foes; in each case the rider and his horse had but been precipitated dying or dead amidst the native warriors, and the living recoiled to form again and charge once more. A sound of rushing wheels was heard, and a detachment of war chariots wheeled round the base of the acclivity on which the village was built. So terrible was the noise from the trampling of the horses and the rolling of the wheels, that the horses of the Romans, less accustomed to such operations, were affrighted, rearing in the air, dashing against each other, and becoming almost unmanageable. By this means the cavalry of the foe were driven backwards, and the impetuosity of the Celtic horse dragged the war chariots, with the fatal scythes attached, into the midst of their ranks, maiming where they did not kill.

Animated by the spectacle of such victorious resistance, the infantry of the Caledonians rushed in likewise, allowing no breathing time to their foes, and deeming the victory secure.

Thus they advanced, led away by the impetuosity of their natures, their blood warmed by the conflict, forgetting that they had but conquered a detachment of cavalry, and scarcely knowing the danger into which they were precipitating themselves, until they saw the scattered relics of the Roman cavalry received behind the protection of the larger body of infantry, superior far to themselves in number, and even more so in arms and discipline.

It would have been madness to have continued offensive operations further; the women and children were all in safety, and it became the duty of the victorious cavalry to retire slowly, and protect the retreat of all the divisions of the little Celtic army.

Last in the retreat was the chieftain Aëdh, sorely wounded in the face by a spear, yet exposing himself to every danger.

He had just checked an advancing column of the foe, at the cost of severe loss to his little band, when he turned to thank one who had fought by his side, and had, by a timely blow, intercepted the thrust of a sword, which would otherwise have cost him his life.

To his surprise it was Eachan, who had snatched sword and shield from the side of a dead warrior, and ranged himself by his father's side.

"Eachan," he said, "poor boy, here by my side; perhaps it is better that thou shouldst die thus; but yet thou mayest be of more service to thy people elsewhere. Listen, do not linger here outside the gate with the rest; pass the village, cross the grove, descend the path by which thou didst free the captive, and then take the road above the loch to the village of my kinsman Lugid; bid him come at once with his followers, if he would save his country, for if the Romans make good their hold here, all is lost, and his turn will follow next."

The boy looked round. The greater part of the retiring Caledonians had already reached the base of the acclivity, up which they were retreating, manning the ramparts as they entered. It was evident, from the manner in which the foe was closing upon them, that there would yet be a desperate struggle, before all the defendants could enter the protection of the rude fortifications.

"Father," said Eachan, "let me die with you here; I cannot leave you in such danger."

"Alas! poor boy, your very presence would arouse the fears of the people, lest the existence of one accursed and doomed to the gods should bring ruin and death upon them; but if you can but reach Lugid, and bring assistance, you may save us all; if you fail, do not return yourself."

"But my poor mother."

A shade crossed the chieftain's brow, but he repressed the rising agony.

"All are alike my care now," he said; "boy, if thou wouldst save thy mother, thou must haste to Lugid; we cannot hold the ramparts against the foe for many hours."

At that moment another attempt was made by the advancing Romans to cut off their victims from the gate. A squadron of cavalry had almost intercepted the path of retreat; Aëdh rushed forward at the head of a gallant little band; a desperate struggle followed, but it was successful, and the whole body, save those lying dead, or wounded, on the plain, saw their retreat secured.

Twilight was fast fading into night; a few warriors yet stood at the base of the acclivity checking the advance of the foe, while they waited their own time to make the final rush for the gate.

At a little distance, sheltered by the gathering darkness, beneath the shade of some bushes, Eachan embraced his father, and sobbed as if his heart would break; he was but a boy.

"Go, my child," said the gallant Aëdh ; "go and bring us succour, thus may thy dire offence be forgiven. Poor boy, I know it was thy mother's tears which compelled thee ; yet it was, perhaps, treason to thy people ; they will pardon if thou savest them now."

"And you, my father."

"I, my boy, I have nought to pardon thee as a father, only as a chieftain ; go, my boy, the gods forgive, bless, and protect thee ; go, and thou mayst save thyself and us."

Eachan broke from that last embrace, cast one longing, lingering look upon his parent, and disappeared in the gloom.

CHAPTER VI.

EACHAN entered the village, unperceived in the darkness and confusion, and sought his home, perhaps for the last time, entered, and found his mother weeping within. She uttered a cry of joy, and mother and son clasped each other convulsively.

"Thou art saved then, my boy," she said, "saved from this cruel priesthood."

"Yes, mother, but at what price? father is safe as yet, may God preserve him; but the foe is very numerous, and I go to bring succour; he has sent me; it is the only hope of the people."

"Must thou go; will none other suffice?"

"Alas, mother, our bliss would be short if I went not, I may not linger one moment; moments are as hours, farewell my own dear mother, I shall soon be with you again, if all is well."

He tore himself from her loving embrace, and was gone.

Crossing the village, he reached the sacred grove, where he had so nearly fallen a victim; it was empty now, and even more impressive in its solemn silence from the distant sounds of battle which broke in subdued murmur upon it. He reached the descending path, descended to the brook, crossed it, and ascended the opposite declivity by a mountain track, well known in happier days.

Arrived upon the summit, he paused and looked back upon the plain.

Dimly could his gaze penetrate the scene, shrouded as it was in the darkness; but the moon was rising, and her dim light fell upon the opposite ridges, leaving the plain in sombre shadow, save where the fires, lighted by the foe, marked their newly-formed encampment, and where other fires gleamed brightly within the rude fortifications of the village.

But no sound, save a faint murmur, broke the mysterious silence—the cries of battle had ceased, nor was there any token to speak to the wayfarer's heart of those whose fate seemed dependent upon his speed.

He was about to leave the scene and to plunge into the darker recesses of the wood before him, when he fancied he saw a figure cross the brook beneath him, upon whose mimic waves, the silver moonbeams had just lighted.

Distrusting the evidence of his senses, he gazed intently upon the spot: yes, it was not a delusion, a second figure clad, like the first, in white, crossed the bright patch of light and plunged into the dark shadows beyond.

Could they be on his track?

There was no time for reflection, and he quickened his pace with perhaps the vague feeling of yet a further necessity for speed, in the thought of the two forms behind him.

He emerged from the wood, and followed the path, which now lay along a ledge of rock on the face of a vast precipice. Below, at a fearful depth, slept the dark waters of a mountain lake, upon whose surface the moonlight or even the sunlight but seldom slumbered, hidden, as it seemed to be, in the very bowels of the earth.

Even in the daylight the path was perilous, but doubly so in the uncertain light of the moon. Yet this was not all; midway in the track, overhanging the glowing waters, lay the mouth of a cave which entered far into the mountain, and had the reputation of being the haunt of evil spirits. Tales were told of its awful inhabitants, which had the effect of making the route less chosen by day time, and utterly banishing all persons from it after sundown.

But yet the Archdruid and his satellites had been met on the road to this drear solitude, when all others were fleeing its vicinity, and it was reported that, careless of supernatural terrors, the aged Broichan sometimes retreated to its shelter for days, during which he was supposed to hold mysterious converse with its spiritual inhabitants.

At any other time Eachan would utterly have avoided the place, but now he prepared facing any imaginary danger, to the risk of leaving his home to the mercy of the Romans, for hours must intervene before he could reach the village of Lugid, by another route.

He was now, after passing a turn in the rocks, in full view of the mouth of this cavern; the ledge which formed the path was barely three feet in width, and beneath it the precipice descended sheer to the waters of the lake, which had not even yet caught the reflection of one solitary moonbeam, while above it the rocks rose precipitously towards the summit of the mountain.

Arrived at last near the fatal spot, Eachan started back, almost lost his balance, and nearly slipped over the brink of the precipice.

Was it a phantom or a reality?

There stood the Druid, Broichan, with extended arms in his very path.

Yes, it was he, in flesh and blood, clamly awaiting the approach of the boy.

For one moment Eachan looked back to seek a mode of escape, and beheld his path intercepted in that direction also, for the two figures in white had entered upon the ledge of rock so that there was no escape. In despair, yielding to the impulse of the moment, he endeavoured to rush past the Arch-druid, but in vain; there was more strength than he imagined in that aged frame, and the arms detained him as in a vice.

"Let me go," he shrieked, "my father's life and the lives of all his people, depend upon my speed; I go to summon Lugid to our help."

"It is useless, thou canst only curse, not bless; the help of one doomed to the gods cannot avail them."

Two other Druids now issued from the cave and the pursuers (if indeed they had been pursuers and had not simply sought the shelter of the cave) came up, and poor Eachan, in spite of his frantic struggles, was bound and led into the cave as a prisoner.

The Druids simply bestowed him in a recess of the vast cave, and he had ample leisure to observe the nature of the abode.

A lamp was suspended from the natural roof and cast faint flickering shadows on the dark corners of the cave, where passages of unknown extent seemed to lead deeper into the heart of the mighty hill. In one corner, an immense heap of brushwood and fuel was piled together, and the Druids evidently regarded it, as they conversed together, as if they found its appearance suggestive.

"Yes," said Broichan, at last, as if in answer to his subordinates, "thus only can the curse be avoided, the victim is delivered into our hands, and we may not spare."

They began at once arranging the fuel in the centre of the cave, beneath a lofty vault in the centre of which there seemed to be a natural opening to the outer air,—they piled the loose brushwood, and placed the heavier fuel systematically upon it, after which they approached the hapless victim, who seemed spell-bound as in a hideous nightmare.

His entreaties and struggles would have been alike in vain, but he was not thus fated to die; a sudden interruption occurred,—the opening of the cave was darkened by warlike figures, the tramp of armed heels resounded, and several Roman soldiers who it appeared had marked the Druids, as they had perhaps marked the steps of Eachan, burst upon them.

A brief but furious struggle ensued, and when it terminated, the Druids themselves were the prisoners.

"What were they going to do with the boy; he is not one of them?" asked a Roman of a companion.

"They were going to sacrifice him to Pluto, I imagine."

"Suppose we sacrifice one of them instead."

Here one of their comrades from without the cave interposed.

"What a precipice this is; how far is it to the water beneath?"

"Throw down a stone, and see how long it is falling."

"No; throw down a Druid, that will be the thing," interposed another.

A shout of hearty laughter, signified approval of this suggestion, and despite his struggles, one of the Druids, who had been severely wounded, was dragged to the brink of the precipice.

They seized him by the head and feet and tossed him over, and, stretching out their heads, gazed as he fell down the fearful descent: they saw the body strike the rock and rebound, then disappear in the darkness, and soon a heavy splash told them that all was over.

"Had we not better finish them all that way."

"Yes; but save the boy, he will be worth something in the slave market."

"Perhaps he is the boy the Imperator bid us all to save if we found him."

"Perhaps he isn't. I think if he is, we must hide him, for the sake of his value; he will be worth his weight in silver if not in gold."

"Well; but meanwhile, let us dispose of the others; they will be in our way; what shall we do with them, burn them, or drown them?"

"Oh, drown them, it will be less trouble; and is more amusing under present circumstances."

In spite of their cries and struggles, Druid after

Druid was hurled from the precipice into the lake. Broichan was the last.

The soldiers now prepared to return on their path leading with them their prisoner, who offered no resistance; his physical and mental powers were completely subdued.

But when they ascended the wood towards the summit of the last hill, which overlooked the plain beneath, a sudden light overspread the skies before them, and the soldiers paused.

"The village must be on fire; our men have succeeded."

They hurried forward, dragging the unhappy boy, and soon he stood on the spot he had so lately left.

All was plainly visible now; the whole village was in flames, and the woods and mountains around were distinct in the blaze. The cries of the victims and triumphant shouts of the conquerors were distinctly heard, borne upon the night wind.

"What is the matter with the boy?" said one, "he has fallen."

"Oh, he is only in a swoon, bring water," said another; "perhaps he has been wounded."

"No, it must be fatigue, but he is too great a prize to be lost."

Forming a litter from the boughs of some trees, they bore him along the ridge of the hills to a spot where a spring gushed forth from the mountain side, and while some of their number employed their leisure in restoring the captive to life, others, collecting wood, made a fire and prepared their supper.

The sounds of strife died away into an awful silence; the conquerors, save their watchful sentinels, slept, while the last long sleep enfolded many in its embrace; and the birds and beasts of of prey scented their banquet afar, scared as yet by the lurid but decaying light which glowed over the red ashes of the village.

BOOK II.

THE ROMANS.

—o—

Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento :
Hæ tibi erunt artes ; pacisque imponere morem,
Parcere subjectis, et debellare superbos.—*Virgil.*

But Rome, 'tis thine alone, with awful sway
To rule mankind, and make the world obey ;
Disposing peace and war thy own majestic way ;
To tame the proud, the fettered slave to free ;
These are imperial arts, and worthy thee.—*Dryden.*

CHAPTER I.

THE sun was shining brightly over the fair face of Roman Britain, in the June of the Year of our Lord 306, brightening her villas and gardens, her woods and streams, so that the many colonists from the mighty empire might easily imagine themselves in their own sunny Italia, save that the verdure of their island home contrasted favourably with the parched plains of their own distant land.

The days of Roman Britain! how hard it is in this nineteenth century to recal them even to the imagination; wave after wave has swept the traces of that early civilization from our land, save where the massive masonry of that wondrous people, who held Britain in subjection, yet bids defiance to time.

Ages of comparative barbarism succeeded the short-lived rule of the southern in Britain, the polished, because Latinized, Celt gave way utterly before the resistless wave of Saxon immigration, and the new comers seemed bent upon the destruction of their predecessors, and of their civilization, together.

In other lands the conquering barbarians, fused with the conquered Latins, formed nations in which the softer virtues of the vanquished united with the sterner qualities of the victors, and the old language, customs, and laws, in a great measure survived the crash; but in Britain it was different; no such fusion took place; the earlier race, breathing yet hatred and defiance, were either exterminated or driven into the mountainous recesses of the west, while their Teutonic successors brought with them their own faith in Thor and Woden, their own laws and customs, for good or for evil, and effaced by fire and sword that fair civilization they found, to be succeeded in lapse of time by a yet fairer civilization.

The rays of the mid-day sun fell brightly that June day upon the fair city of *Durocina*, situated at the junction of the streams which formed the Tamesis; they fell brightly upon its amphitheatre, its basilica, its temples, its villas and fortifications, and made the shelter of the trees, which grew thickly on the banks of the rivers, doubly inviting; but they fell utterly unimpeded upon the hard stone pavement of the forum, upon which the heat seemed to quiver, as it was refracted by the white stones.

Slightly under the shade of an arcade, which bordered one side of the space, a group of slaves was exposed for auction, and the slave-dealer in loud accents was inviting the purchasers to inspect his living wares. They stood waiting their turn, ranged in a row along the wall,—the young maiden with downcast eyes, youths who had been torn from father or mother by the death of a former master and the consequent dispersion of his household, old men scarcely worth the expense of keeping them, with children, just becoming inured to labour and hardship.

From their necks was suspended a titulus, or scroll, as a warranty to the purchaser, whereupon the virtues and also the defects of the slave were legibly written, the vender being bound to receive the slave again, and to return his price at any time within six months, if any manifest defect was not duly announced on the scroll.

Sadly the poor creatures hung down their heads, while curious spectators passed amongst them, felt their muscles, or asked personal questions, hard enough sometimes to answer.

Here the scroll announced that the maiden who bore it had a tendency to epilepsy, here another stated that the former master sold the slave because the young boy in question was a thief, and needed much application of the scourge, the price being thereby considerably lowered, and the chance of a humane master reduced to an inappreciable amount; here slaves were to be sold without any warranty, and a pileus (or cap) upon the head testified to the fact, the others being bareheaded despite the danger of sun-stroke.

But there was one slave, who stood a little apart from the rest, who attracted considerable attention from the purchasers, for his feet were whitened by chalk, signifying that he was a newly imported slave sold into slavery for the first time, and as yet unaccustomed to the yoke.

Poor youth, if unaccustomed to the yoke, he had made acquaintance with the scourge, for his back was sadly scarred and his hands were secured by a thong, while the scroll round his neck told a sad tale when it announced his disposition to suicide! Tall and well made, his prepossessing face attracted much notice, especially from the fairer sex, but there was a look of sullen obstinacy upon his features which detracted greatly from the beauty of his countenance. A physiognomist would have seen that severity had both utterly failed to tame him and *would* utterly fail, but perhaps he would have hoped much from kindness. Yet the pressure of a hopeless grief was the chief characteristic, but this was so common a thing in the slave market, that it attracted little observation, and less sympathy.

Intending purchasers inspected his arms, and handled him about much as a purchaser would now examine a horse he wished to buy, for slave-dealers had as many tricks as the horse jockeys of our own day.

One purchaser was even attended by his medical man, who called his attention to the youthful captive, and seemed lost in admiration at the development of sinew, although he shook his head as he gazed at the expression of the face and read the notification concerning suicide.

In the centre of the arcade was a large raised stone, upon which slave after slave was made to mount while the purchasers made their bids.

Amidst the laughter of the crowd, the young boy whose chief recommendation was the notification concerning his stealing propensities, was placed upon the stone; he was a pert young urchin, probably born in slavery, and indurated to physical hardships and bodily pain.

He looked carelessly around him, and neither moved nor opened his lips when his muscles were somewhat sharply pinched and he was otherwise roughly handled.

"Stand up, Dromo, and show yourself like a man," said the auctioneer. "Stretch your arms out, and let this good citizen look at the muscle. There, citizens, is muscle for you; he can raise a hundred libræ, and scarcely bend his body."

"Yes, if it were a hundred libræ of stolen goods, doubtless."

"He has been trained to gardening."

"Set a cat to watch the cream. What would become of the pears and cherries?"

"The scourge will correct all that; give him regularly a dozen on the naked back, it always keeps him in order."

The young urchin smiled somewhat contemptuously.

"He has pluck, the young one," said another; "best train him up as a gladiator."

"He has been employed in the kitchen of Rutilius, and has been found very skilful in——"

"Eating the pastry and preserves," suggested a spectator.

"I will give a sestertium," said one bidder.

"A sestertium indeed, why you must be a circulator, and intend to sell him for *ten* to-morrow."

"Let me see him," said a burly-looking tradesman, pushing through the group, a well-known butcher of the town. "I know how to keep boys in order. What is his name?"

"Dromo."

"How old are you, boy?"

"Thirteen."

"What can you do?"

"Anything."

"Can you be honest?"

"I don't know."

"Well, we will try; two sestertia, Hispalus."

"Two donkeys," replied that amiable individual; "why it is giving him away; be in earnest, gentlemen, I pray you!"

"Here comes Heliodorus; he will bid for him, I will be bound," said another.

"Heliodorus, the old vulture! yes, but what becomes of his slaves, no one knows."

Even the hardened boy repressed a shudder with difficulty, for the new comer, a citizen of Durocina, of Greek descent, was a mysterious old man, who was one of those strange monsters to whom cruelty gives positive pleasure. He had often been noticed to purchase slaves, who for some reason were very cheap bargains; no one knew what became of them, and no one cared to enquire, for were they not his own property, and might not a man do as he pleased with his own?

He drew near the group, and saluted the bystanders demurely. He had a brown wrinkled face, a curved nose, and eyes like those of a hawk.

"On the look out for prey, Heliodorus?"

"Yes, to be sure," he replied; "I want a lively young slave or two."

"Here is one going then; the last bid was two sestertia."

The old Greek looked keenly at the slave, peered into his face with a somewhat strange expression.

"*Three* sestertia," he cried.

The boy seemed anxious, and the cool impudence of his demeanour forsook him.

"Ah, Dromo," said the butcher laughing, "I must ask thee some more questions; what can you do?"

"I can attend to a garden,—I can take care of horses,—I can scrub floors, and keep the pavement *so* clean,—I can help the cook,—I can—"

"Ah, I thought we should see a change; Heliodorus, you are a wonder worker; you ought always to come here; you raise the qualifications of a slave immediately; why you look at the boy as if you wanted to eat him."

"Now, Dromo, can you be honest?"

"Oh, yes," said the boy, "I never mean to steal again."

"*Four* sestertia," said the butcher."

"*Five*," said the Greek.

"I can afford no more," said the butcher.

"Oh, *do* buy me," said Dromo, looking piteously at him, while all the spectators laughed aloud.

"*Six* sestertia, then," said that worthy.

"*Seven*," replied the Greek.

The butcher could make no further advance, and poor Dromo would have become the property of Heliodorus, had not a citizen of somewhat dignified bearing stepped abruptly in,—a man known to be of enormous wealth.

"I mean to have the boy at any price," he said; "he is too good for the crows, at least. *Ten* sestertia; if Heliodorus makes advances let it be ten sestertia a time."

"Terentius," said Heliodorus, "you make too much of your purse."

"So much the better for Dromo," he replied.

No further bid was made, and Dromo was given to Terentius, who immediately made him over to the butcher, for the six sestertia, his object having simply been to defeat Heliodorus.

"What," said that worthy, sneeringly, "are you become a circulator,—one who buys to sell again?"

"He would be but a poor circulator who bought at ten and sold at six; but we understand each other."

Slave after slave was put up and disposed of, until at last the newly-captured youth was placed on the block.

"Here, gentlemen, is a young Caledonian, captured by Constantine, in his last campaign! a fit subject for a sculptor, or painter, or worth the attention of any patrician who needs a personal attendant."

"What is his name?" said one.

"How old is he?" said another.

"Fine job to break him in," said a third.

"How can you keep him from suicide?" said a fourth.

And the remarks were endless, during which Heliodorus kept his eyes fixed on the unfortunate lad, with the same kind of look with which a hungry beast might have regarded him through the bars of a cage.

"You may call him by any name you please," said the auctioneer; "his age must be sixteen; if you wish to keep him from suicide, you must simply keep weapons out of his way for a time, he will soon forget that idea, when in a well-managed family."

"What is your name, boy?" asked the citizen whose medical adviser was his prompter.

There was no answer.

"What tongue does he speak, Celtic or Latin?"

"Celtic," said Hispalus, "since he is Caledonian, but he has hardly found his tongue yet, the scourge would make him speak."

Lucilius, the citizen before mentioned, came forward.

"Boy," he said, "I wish to hear you speak, if it be your good pleasure; have you no tongue?"

The captive seemed as if he did not hear the words addressed to him.

"Suppose you give him a taste of the whip, Hispalus?"

"I might as well lash that pillar, so far as a cry or an answer is concerned."

"And yet," said Terentius, "he looks as if he were simply crushed by some calamity. Was there not some talk, Hispalus, about a boy the Cæsar wished to save in the late campaign when some village was burnt, but could not find him?"

"For a very good reason, if Hispalus had got him."

"I know nothing of such matters," replied the annoyed slave-dealer; "he was sold by the victorious soldiers, after the combat, to the merchant from whom I purchased him."

Terentius turned aside from the throng, and conferred with a youth of some seventeen years.

"Lucius," he said, "would that boy answer your purpose?"

"If he found his tongue, and could be domesticated, and would simply obey he might do, father."

"Of course, he *must* obey; he would be a very valuable slave if well trained; but they are beginning to bid; listen."

"A sestertium," said one.

"You ought to pay us for taking him off your hands," said another.

"Nonsense, citizens; he is worth a hundred sestertia; I have sold boys no brighter and better in appearance for that price."

"Yes, but they were trained, educated slaves; what can this poor creature do?"

"He might be trained to any employment."

"Who would give a hundred sestertia for a slave with the suicidal mania?"

"*Two* sestertia," said the croaking voice of the Greek.

"What at it again, Heliodorus? He is a young tiger, and will cut your throat."

"I can mind my own business, if you can do the same."

"Don't be angry; it is only a friendly warning."

"Does the boy understand Latin?"

"Listen," said the physician, fixing his eye upon the boy, and speaking to Hispalus in Latin, "I want to purchase a slave for an experiment in surgery. I have to practise for a difficult operation; I have yet to learn to do it successfully; it has failed me when I have tried it on animals, and I think I must purchase a useless slave, according to the proverb, "Fiat experimentum in corpore vili.' I will give three sestertia for the purpose."

Still the face gave no indication that the conversation had been comprehended.

"*Four*," said Heliodorus, amidst the laughter of the bystanders.

"*Five*," said a circulator,—one who bought to sell again at a higher price.

Terentius came forward, and Heliodorus regarded him with no friendly glance.

"I think I shall be a bidder again. *Ten* sestertia."

"*Fifteen*," said Heliodorus, fiercely.

"*Twenty*," said Terentius, contemptuously, and the matter was ended.

"Shall I send him to your villa, most noble Terentius?"

"Yes, before sundown. Come, Lucius, another bath will be very refreshing; this heat is killing." And the father and son left the assemblage.

Thus Eachan became the slave of Terentius.

NOTE.—*The sestertium was a sum, not a coin, and was worth about £7 16s. 3d. in modern money.*

CHAPTER II.

THE villa of Terentius stood outside the walls of the city, on the southern side, looking towards the river, from which it was separated by a large tract of meadow land, called the Campus Martius, wherein military exercises took place, and the frequent revels and other recreations of the military or civilians were held.

It was long since those walls or fortifications had been needed for defence; under the Roman rule, southern Britain had enjoyed a long peace, so deep, that the island hardly figures in history, for the greater portion of the period, and the recent struggle between Constantius and the usurpers, Carausius and Allectus, had scarcely affected the midland districts. Happy are the people who have no history, it has been said.

And so generation after generation passed away under the firm, but in Britain, *mild* sway of Rome. The southern shores of the island and the banks of our great rivers were almost as thickly covered with the villas of the upper classes, as they are now, while all the luxury and arts of Italy, with, alas, many of its vices, had been imported into Britain. So that the Roman colonists sought out our island as an agreeable place of residence, and forgot the earlier traditions of its chilling mists, or sunless days.*

It is perhaps an interesting subject of reflection that, in the earlier centuries of the Christian era, our land possessed all the elements of that mighty civilization: security of property, arts, and letters, elegant and imposing architecture, and roads to which no modern roads could bear comparison, until this age of railroads.

The city of Durocina was an important military station, situated above the junction of the Tame and Isis, where, uniting, they formed the magnificent stream of the Tamesis or Thames.

Between the rivers, above their junction, lay a fine alluvial plain, while on the opposite banks the ground rose somewhat abruptly from the stream.

Beyond the stream rose two twin hills of moderate height, partially covered with wood, and forming very conspicuous objects, from the city, then known as the Synodune hills, from an early British encampment, which had existed upon them in the time of the mighty Cymbeline, otherwise known as Cuno or Syno.

A line of earthworks, forming the chord of an arc between the two streams, which formed the *Tamesis*, thrown up probably in days long anterior to the

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* *See Note E.*

Roman occupation, was utilized as the southern defence of the city, supplemented by walls of massive thickness, in which a gateway, flanked by lofty circular towers of stone, gave egress to the plain, extending to the rivers on either side, and known as the Campus Martius, in fond remembrance of the renowned spot, bearing that name in the mighty metropolis, Rome.

The city was not destitute of legendary lore; here the sons of Cymbeline, Caractacus and Togodunus, had made a desperate resistance to the victorious legions of Plautius, A.D., 43; but neglecting the defence of the swollen river, made the earthworks their rampart; the enemy crossed the stream unperceived, frightened the horses which drew the chariots, and threw the Britons into such utter confusion that when Vespasian, afterwards emperor, and his brother Sabinus, crossing the ford at the junction of the streams, fell upon their flanks, Togodunus was slain, and they fled in utter confusion.*

Here, probably, Plautius remained and awaited the arrival of the Emperor Claudius, with reinforcements, whereby the final defeat of the Britons was secured, and Claudius returned to enjoy a triumph in the imperial city.

There were many suburban villas outside the

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* *See Note F.*

walls of the city, especially upon the banks of the stream, and around the Campus Martius. One of these villas was the abode of Terentius, which stood near the junction of the streams, the view from its portico being bounded by the twin hills beyond the river, and by the ridge, which extended eastward from their summits.

It was a large and spacious building; the entrance from the portico opened upon an *atrium*, or hall, surrounded by a colonnade, supported by pillars, in summer open above the impluvium in its centre to the sky, in winter closed by a temporary roof; beyond the atrium, passages led past the triclinium, or dining room, to a larger court, the peristylium, of similar character, with hot-house plants in profusion occupying the central space, and chambers appropriated to various purposes opening from the colonnade around. The flooring which these rooms rested upon was a tesselated pavement, beneath which were arrangements for heating the rooms with hot air during the colder months of the year.*

But the interior of the mansion was lavishly adorned with exquisite plants and flowers, while lovely creepers, bearing flowers of exquisite odour, entwined themselves around the pillars, which were richly painted and gilded.

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* *See Note G.*

Terentius was a native of Italy, but in his early youth he had emigrated to Britain where he had made a large fortune as a corn-factor, for Britain grew so much corn that in a famine, caused by the incursions of the Germans upon the Roman provinces of the upper Rhine, she was able to load a fleet of eight hundred barks of large size with so much grain that it sufficed to support the inhabitants of the desolated region through the winter and until the next harvest.

Having made his fortune, he retired early from business, a widower, with his son Lucius the sole inheritor of his wealth.

He was rich and somewhat ostentatious, a little inclined to sudden wrath, but upon the whole a man of generous and kindly feelings.

The reader will easily imagine the lacerated feelings of our unhappy hero, Eachan.

Save the day when he had become the prey of the victorious legionaries,—when father and mother and home had all been swept away by one fell stroke,—such desolation had fallen upon him that it seemed almost relieved by the bitterness and hatred he felt to the conquerors.

He would not speak to them, and persevered in this resolution, despite blows and curses; in this silence he persevered, when transferred from soldiers to slave-merchant, and during the rapid journey to Southern Britain; but the violence of his feelings had spent itself, and the necessity of submitting to his fate was but too evident.

During the scene in the slave-market, his knowledge of Latin, the ordinary tongue spoken by the educated natives of Britain, was quite sufficient for him to comprehend the escape he had had, when Terentius foiled the intending purchaser, Heliodorus; and a passing emotion of thankfulness came upon him, yet he cared for life so little, that his gratitude was not deep.

He was taken by the order of Hispalus, the slave-merchant, to the villa of his future master, where he had no sooner arrived than he was received by Simus, the freedman of Terentius, who, according to orders he had received, cut his bonds at once; gave him water to wash the hateful chalk from his feet, took him into the chamber set apart for the slaves, and set food before him, asking him his name. He returned no answer, and scarcely touched the food, but Simus took pity upon his misery, and dismissed him to the little cell where he was to sleep, telling him he would have a talk with him in the morning.

It was a little cell furnished with a small plain couch and a chest for his clothes, a suit such as were worn by domestic slaves, very coarse, but clean and neat, being already placed upon the chest.

The little window, plated with coarse glass, opened upon the gardens, but it was not transparent enough to permit things without to be discerned through its medium.

He stretched himself out upon his bed, and slept the first sound sleep since his captivity,—the first unloaded by fetters.

He awoke early, the summer sun was shining brightly on his bed, and the birds were singing cheerily; it was about the tenth hour of the night, as we should say, four in the morning.

His thoughts were very busy: he was studying what future course he should adopt. He would no longer preserve silence, it was too painful an effort; besides he might escape, if he only were prudent.

But where could he fly to? His so-called treachery in freeing the captive, coupled with the fact that he had been absent from the village, when his father, as he supposed (and rightly), had fallen, would make it impossible for those of his people who remained to receive him otherwise than as a victim for the Druids.

He had longed for death, but the longing was passing away; he was young, and the elasticity of youth was in his favour.

Still the thought of slavery was utterly repulsive to him,—he could not submit; but what else could he do?

While thus thinking, there came a light rap upon the door; it opened, as he lay, and a little fellow, of about twelve years of age, entered, clad in a slave's dress.

He was a little fellow with large blue eyes, and crisp curling hair, which was very luxuriant.

"Are you the new slave," he said, "who is to be my companion?"

There was something so simple and childlike about the little fellow, that Eachan could not be morose towards him.

"Yes," he said, "I suppose so; what is your name?"

"Crispus, because I have got such curly hair; what is yours?"

"They will give me a new name, as I suppose they did you."

"Oh, no; I was born here."

"Then have you always been a slave?"

"Yes; haven't you!"

"No," sighed Eachan, "and I do not think I *can* be one long."

"But it is not so very bad if you have a kind master."

"Is Terentius a kind master?"

"Yes, but he gets into a passion sometimes, only not so often as Lucius."

"Who is Lucius?"

"Don't you know? he is your master and mine; he is the young lord."

"What have we to do for him?"

"Oh, we put his room in order, clean his ponies, run on errands for him, take care of his clothes, go out with him when he wants us, and do all manner of things."

"And how does he treat you?"

"Oh, very well; he gives me a touch of the riding whip sometimes, or of anything that comes in his way, when I am not very sharp; but it does not hurt much, not half so much as the scourge."

Eachan ground his teeth.

"But you had better get up and put on your new clothes, and come with me to the stables; we must see to the ponies, and Simus has told me to tell you all about it."

With a sigh which made little Crispus open his big blue eyes, Eachan arose, and accompanied his little companion to the stables, where they had to attend to the two beautiful ponies which Lucius possessed.

It is needless to say Crispus did most of the work, and afterwards took his companion to the common apartment of the slaves, where in company with the rest of the household, under the presidency of Pyranus, the butler, an old slave of Celtic descent, already grey-headed, a plain but abundant meal was provided.

It was now the second hour of the day, and Simus, the freedman, made his appearance, took Eachan aside, asked him his name, and receiving the answer that they had better give him one, for he did not wish to bear in slavery the name he had borne in freedom, assigned him the name *Evanus* a Latinized form of a Celtic name, and then addressed him as follows:—

"You are a fortunate lad, if you only knew it; Terentius is a generous master, he never touches the peculium* of a slave, and you will have plenty of opportunity to lay by money, and perhaps some day to buy your own freedom; only, my lad, don't give way to bad temper, if you have been better off; why, there are ups and downs of life, and I don't know that a slave isn't as well off as a freedman; at all events, he is often better fed, and I'll be bound you did not sleep so softly, or fare so delicately, in those horrid wilds of Caledonia from which you have come, as they tell me, as you will fare here. You must of course take care how you answer your master for he has a quick temper, and is a little, just a little, sharp with his whip, but you must not mind that."

Thus Simus discoursed but it was all gall and wormwood to poor Eachan, or Evanus as we must now call him.

"You had better now go with Crispus to your master's chamber, he has risen, and is taking his prandium (breakfast) in the triclinium; see you leave everything in good order; always begin well,—as a slave makes his bed, so he lies upon it."

The chamber of Lucius was most elegantly

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* See *Note H.*

furnished, and Evanus beheld, with some amazement, the luxury in which the dwellers in civilization reposed; the couch was covered with a mattress of the softest wool, and the curtains were of most beautiful design, the furniture of the room was of the most delicate workmanship, and everything betokened the presence of wealth and its power.

"Look," said Crispus, "at this beautiful bow and arrows; he sometimes goes out in the woods, and takes us with him; and look at this fishing tackle, ah, here are his ivory tablets, we must put them up in this desk; see how sharp his stylus is; he sometimes gives one a poke when he is angry; he made me bleed dreadfully one day."

"Did he?"

"Oh, it soon got well again; I didn't mind it much."

They had just completed their labour, when Lucius entered and glanced quickly around him.

"That will do," he said, "you have begun well enough, Evanus; isn't that the name Simus has given you?"

"Yes, it is."

Lucius sat down and made several enquiries about the age of his new attendant, his former life, his qualifications, to all of which Evanus made brief but straightforward replies, which seemed to satisfy his master.

"And now," said Lucius, at length, "you may get the ponies ready for a ride; I shall take you both with me."

The eye of little Crispus sparkled with pleasure; he was a complete child, and they hurried to the stables.

In a short time they left the villa, and rode over the Campus Martius; at the foot of the hills there was then a ford, which they crossed, and ascended the eastern hill through the copsewood, which lined the acclivity.

It was but a low hill, compared with those of Eachan's own country, but the view was beautiful; below them lay the river, which here made a bend from the south to the east, passing under the low wooded range of hills.

Opposite, to the side they had left, lay the city of Durocina, lovely in the light of the summer sun, which brightened its towers, its temples, its public baths, its large amphitheatre, which then adorned it, as all the chief cities in Roman Britain were adorned, so that, as it is well remarked, the edifices raised by the Romans in Britain, excelled all others north of the Alps; and Evanus fresh from the mountains of Caledonia, gazed in surprise.*

Beyond the city lay richly cultivated fields and vineyards, wherein the Italians strove somewhat un-

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* See *Note I.*

successfully, to cultivate the vine as in sunny Italy; and then the eye ranged over vast woods, stretching northward and eastward towards the distant hills, which surmounted them, like a blue line of cloud in the horizon.

Just then the eye of Lucius was caught by a hawk swooping near them.

"Quick, Evanus, my boy," he said, and fixing the arrow rapidly in the string, sent it after the bird, who sailed aloft in contemptuous safety.

Lucius looked mortified, the more so as he caught a somewhat sarcastic expression on the face of Evanus.

"Can you shoot?" he said.

"A little."

"See whether you can hit that pigeon on yonder tree."

Evanus let the arrow fly, and the bird, although at a great distance, fell transfixed.

"You can shoot, at least," he said, "what have you shot at before?"

"Wolves, eagles, sometimes men."

"What men I wonder?"

"Roman soldiers."

Lucius shrugged his shoulders, but did not seem to care to continue the conversation, and they retraced their road towards the river.

Arrived at the ford, Lucius, who was but an indifferent horseman, compelled Evanus to dismount and to lead his horse through the water, an office which he performed with such an indifferent grace, as greatly to disgust his young owner, who was accustomed to the utmost deference on the part of the domestic slaves, and disliked the trouble of compelling an obedience generally so readily given. But although naturally of an impatient temperament, he was willing to give his new acquisition a fair trial, and they returned home in peace.

The remainder of the day passed away in the ordinary domestic labours, and degrading enough they seemed to Evanus. At sunset he had finished his work, and was allowed to wander about in the city with Crispus, where, naturally, the buildings he saw, and the manners and customs of the people, should have interested him; but he gazed listlessly upon them as one in a dream. His heart was in the Highlands of Caledonia.

CHAPTER III.

THE third day of the servitude of Evanus in the house of Terentius had arrived, and to his hitherto free and unfettered spirit, they had been days of intolerable bondage.

Indulged in every caprice through his boyhood, accustomed to the freedom of a life in the wilderness, surrounded by companions who had bowed to his wishes as to those of the son of their chieftain, he was now a slave amongst slaves, subject to the caprices and tyranny, as he esteemed it, of one far inferior in birth to himself.

As yet he had received no blow, and his position was one which many unhappy slaves might have envied; he neither knew hunger, thirst, nor any of those hardships too common to those who shared his present station in life; yet things which seemed natural and right to Crispus, nourished in slavery, were intolerable to Evanus. And he had shewn this so often, that Lucius had been more than once on the point of striking him, but had restrained himself; he hardly knew why, save that there was something in the manner of his slave which deterred him.

"How do you like your new slave?" said Terentius to his son at the "prandium," or morning meal, on the day in question.

"Not much; he is as proud as an emperor, and does whatever he does reluctantly. I really must give him a slight scourging, or at least a taste of the whip."

"It may not do him any harm; but do not be too severe, it will be a new thing to him."

"For the matter of that, Hispalus gave it him somewhat sharply, if we may trust to the scars on his back for evidence."

"Yes, while the poor wretch's hands were bound so tightly, that you may see the rings round the wrist even yet."

"I shall not be too sharp upon him at first, father; but if he is to be of any use he must be broken in; Crispus does all the work, his own and Evanus' too."

"He is a pretty little curly haired boy, that Crispus; but if Evanus turns out well, he will be a far more valuable slave; however, you may be right, and perhaps it will be necessary to try the effect of some little compulsion; if he does not work, ask Simus to see that he is beaten, but not too severely."

"I will see what I can do myself first, father."

"Well, I daresay you can manage it well enough, if the operation does not fatigue you."

While the foregoing conversation was taking place, Evanus and Crispus had been busy as usual in arranging the room of their master, or rather Crispus had been busy, for Evanus no sooner entered the cubiculum than he threw himself down on the couch, like one utterly weary of life.

"What is the matter," said Crispus, laughing; "are you not going to help me?"

"No, I cannot endure this any longer; did you not hear Simus threaten me with the scourge, in the presence of the whole household?"

"Oh, that is nothing, he is sure to forget all about it."

"Forget all about it," said Evanus, starting up and pacing the little room, "a man like Simus, a mere freedman, to threaten *my* father's son with the scourge!"

Crispus stared at his friend, but said nothing.

"It is all very well for you, you were born in it, but I can and will endure it no longer; let them kill me if they like, but I cannot endure this."

"Oh, Evanus," said the little Crispus, "don't be so foolish; they will *really* hurt you if they hear you talk like this; do submit, don't be so angry, you can't help it; supposing they were to send you to work at the pistrinum;* supposing they even sold, you to some cruel master."

* See *Note K.*

"Let them do what they will, I cannot bear this."

Crispus did not know what to say; he could not understand his companion, and tried to put the room in order, but he made small progress, for Evanus did nothing, and was rather in the way.

While matters were in this state, Lucius appeared at the door.

"What does this mean?" he said. "Evanus, why are you not helping Crispus again, you lazy hound, letting the little one do all the work, as usual; do you think you are simply a machine for eating, drinking, and sleeping?"

Evanus made no reply.

"Are you going to rouse yourself, or do you wish to taste the scourge?"

The eyes of the young Celt flashed fire.

Lucius felt very angry.

"Leave the cubiculum," he said; "wait outside in the atrium."

Evanus left the room without a word, and leaned against one of the pillars; his lips were compressed, and his fists clenched, and he looked about as if seeking something.

Just then Lucius, having found his riding whip, came into the atrium.

"Stand out on the pavement."

Evanus did not move, and Lucius struck him heavily with the whip where he stood.

Quick as a flash of lightning, Evanus darted forward, struck Lucius full in the face with his clenched fist, and knocked him down.

He fell heavily on the pavement, and the rebellious slave stood over him, then suddenly controlling himself, leaned back, panting and breathless with excitement, against the pillar.

It was but for an instant; Terentius had heard the fall, and issued from the triclinium, his arms uplifted in astonishment, leaving a visitor, Lutatius, the lanista, who had just entered, and had seen the blow, at its entrance.

"Simus! Pyranus!" shouted Terentius.

The domestics appeared, and two of them stepped up to Evanus, who submitted to be led away, as one who disdained unavailing resistance.

They thrust him into the ergastulum, a cell but seldom used in the villa of Terentius, and left him to his meditations.

They were bitter enough now that the excitement was over; the feelings of hatred seemed to have evaporated with the blow, and he felt how fearfully he had endangered not merely his comforts but his life. For rebellion was the one cardinal sin which the Roman law punished with unmitigated severity, and rebellion in a slave, if it reached to the length of a blow, was commonly punished with death, the refractory slave being often presented as a meal to the beasts, for the amusement of the populace, sometimes scourged to death, or crucified.

It was not death that Evanus feared, yet he felt that he had thrown all the chances of the future away by one hasty act.

No one came near him for hours, till, towards nightfall, Simus entered, almost timidly, as if he dreaded the captive, and placed a loaf of bread and jar of water on the floor of the little prison, which was lighted by an aperture in the wall.

He did not speak, till he was on the point of closing the iron-bound door, when he simply said, "Do you know what you have done?"

"Yes."

"Are you mad then, or do you wish to be the food of the beasts?"

"I would sooner be their food than live as a slave," said the boy fiercely, "or let them scourge me."

"You will have your wish, then," said Simus, as he closed the door.

There was no other sound for about an hour, when a childish voice was heard through the aperture in the wall.

"Oh, Evanus, how are you? I am so sorry; why did you do it?"

"Is it you, Crispus?" said the captive somewhat softened.

"Yes, but they would be so angry if they knew I spoke to you; they all say you deserve to die. Oh, Evanus, *do* beg pardon; beg them to forgive you, and promise never to do it again, when they come to you; I think they will forgive you, perhaps, if you do, for Terentius is not at all cruel."

Evanus felt his pride revive.

"No, Crispus," he said, "you might say so, for you have always been a slave, but I cannot."

Evanus heard the little fellow sob, and felt much softened by the evident affection which Crispus showed him, the more so as he did not know how he had gained it; but poor Crispus was one of those warm-hearted beings whose affections must attach themselves to some one, and, in default of other object, they had entwined themselves around his fellow slave.

Steps were heard approaching, and Crispus went quietly away.

The night came on, dark and gloomy indeed to the unhappy captive; he scarcely closed his eyes; his thoughts wandered towards his home, his father and his mother, and he found some relief as the tears rushed unbidden from the eyes; once his thoughts fixed themselves with intense vividness upon the fragments of Christian teaching he had so partially imbibed from his mother, and the sublime precepts of love, peace, and forgiveness pierced like a beam of light the darkness of his soul, till they were again driven away by the darker feelings which the sterner teachings of his boyhood had implanted.

Then came the thought of the possible horrors of the morrow, of the death of shame to which it was in the power of his master to condemn him, and the flesh shrank, brave although the spirit was.

Poor Evanus! his was a sad fate; a character naturally containing the elements of much that was good and noble was being tried in the fire of affliction and temptation; the one true Faith which might have saved him and reconciled him to his lot, was but partially known to him; and the sterner and fiercer elements of his character, strengthened as they had been by the songs of the bards and the tales of victory over his present oppressors, burnt fiercely and strongly; they were but as the waves which dash the bark against the rocks where it must perish.

The morning dawned. Was it the last he was ever to see?

We must now lead our readers back to the hour when Evanus had dealt the blow which involved him in such danger.

Terentius returned, boiling with rage, to the triclinium, where he found his friend, Lutatius, the lanista, or master of the school of gladiators, awaiting him; he could not believe his eyes as he looked upon the face of his friend, still less his ears.

"Was it not a splendid blow? Jupiter, what muscles, it might have felled an ox!"

"Lutatius!"

"I never saw anything like it; you might have attended the schools for years without seeing a finer hit."

"Lutatius, you astonish me."

"So was I astonished, I assure you; why really he is worth his weight in gold; the ladies would dote upon him."

"What can you mean?"

"Why that splendid slave of yours. I envy you the possession of such a young hero."

"Lutatius, you forget that Lucius is my son."

"By Jove, so I did; but pardon me my friend, consider my professional feelings, and forgive me; but you have a consolation in owning such muscle."

"If I send him to the lions, I hope they will not find it too tough."

"Send him to the lions! surely you are joking, Terentius; why, send an old decrepid butler like Pyranus, he will do well enough to feed them, but this young fellow is made for something better."

"An example must be made; I am not cruel, but unless he makes the most abject submission he ought to die."

"Nothing of the kind, my good Terentius; you mean he ought to become a gladiator. There, I will give you any price you name for him."

"Money will not heal the disgrace he has publicly inflicted upon my son."

"If you want blood, then, he is tolerably sure to die under the hands of some adversary sooner or later; only the people ought to have their enjoyment out of it."

"Let him fight a tiger, then, just the thing for him; they say there is one at Tamesis (Wallingford); I will subscribe towards its purchase, and he shall be its first victim, as a terror to rebellious slaves."

"You do not mean it, Terentius; you are not so cruel either to the boy or the good people of Durocina. Now I will tell you a thing. I have a young German whom I have just bought, fresh from his native forests, and I am teaching him the cestus: but I want to get a worthy adversary; this young Celt will just do, only they must fight for the honour of their native woods; ha! ha!"

"But Evanus is too young."

"Not a bit of it; you saw how he struck out,—I beg your pardon,—but the good people like to see young flesh and blood on the arena, there is more piquancy about it, a fuller flavour; I can assure you it will make quite a sensation at the September games."

"Well," said Terentius, "you shall have the lad at the price I gave for him,—twenty sestertia,—only he shall be well scourged before he goes."

The morning dawned, and about the first hour the door of the ergastulum was opened; two stout men from the city, accustomed to the business, seized the hands of Evanus, and forced them into a handcuff, with a business-like air, which showed that it was mere matter of every day occupation to them. They led him, unresisting, to the atrium, where the whole household, by order of Terentius, had assembled; a rope was passed around the confined wrists, and drawn over a pulley fixed in the roof above the spot where he had struck the blow; his tunic was stripped from his back, and the scourge applied skilfully by the professionals. In a short time the blood started from the back, but dipping a kind of sponge in some brine which stood by, they mopped the wounded portions, and continued until there was a sudden strain upon the cord. Evanus had fainted from excessive pain.

They carried him to his own cell, and stretched him upon the couch, and applied water freely; when he came to himself, they left him to recover from his torture.

A few hours later, under the care of two tall gladiators, Eachan left the house of Terentius for the school of the lanista.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GLADIATORS.

AMONGST the institutions of Imperial Rome, which were copied at a humble distance by her colonies, the sports of the amphitheatre were, alas! most conspicuous. To the softer races of Britain, or of the East, the effusion of blood, the spectacle of human agony, presented originally little attraction, but the phenomenon which physiologists call animal bloodthirstiness, feeds rapidly upon its gratification, and grows and thrives to an extent which its victims, whether spectators or sufferers, would have once believed impossible.

Thus S. Augustine gives an instance of the manner in which his friend Alypius abstained with horror from the amphitheatre, but, being taken there at last by the compulsion of his companions, shut his eyes, determined not to see the spectacle; a gladiator fell, the multitude shouted, Alypius gazed for one moment, and the same feverish delight seized him, and held him, alas! for a long period in its awful grasp, so that he frequented those bloody scenes from choice, until the grace of God recalled him to a better mind.

And thus the same fever had seized upon the inhabitants of Roman Britain; the Romans were born in it, the Latinized Celts grew into the love of the scenes; but probably it never gained the hold upon them which it had upon the more hardened and brutalized populace of the Imperial city.

So Lutatius, the lanista of Durocina, had the care and direction of the sports of the amphitheatre in the provincial town, and the support of nearly all its population. Not quite all, for Christianity existed here, but existed hidden beneath the surface of society, quivering yet under the cruel strokes of the last great persecution, which had found its victims in Britain, and even in Durocina itself.*

The great games for the coming September were announced, and only six weeks of preparation remained. It was commonly hoped that Constantius himself, who was then at York, but was about to make a progress through Southern Britain, would favour them with his presence, but, at least, his brave son Constantine, the favourite of the legions in Britain, might come.

There were no criminals for the beasts, and indeed beasts themselves were very scarce, and commanded a high price in Britain. A tiger had just been presented to the people of Tamesis, a town four miles lower down the river, but since there were no criminals to suffer, and British humanity

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* See *Note L.*

even then recoiled from providing innocent victims, the most cruel and therefore most exciting act of the sanguinary drama would be wanting. Still there were hired gladiators, or slaves who, like Evanus, had been forced to become gladiators, and an attractive bill of fare might be provided without difficulty.

So the people were promised great things: a retiarius and secutor, three pair of Thracian gladiators, armed with faulchions, and bearing only a little shield as a defence to the body; a larger amount of native talent, exhibited with various weapons, and an encounter of great interest, between two essedarii, who were to fight after the manner of their ancestors from war chariots.

But it was especially announced that two young and handsome gladiators, a Caledonian and a German, not exceeding respectively the age of seventeen, would make their first appearance on the arena, and would contend with the cestus, that is, with their fists strengthened by bands of iron, so that a single blow full upon the forehead would cause immediate death.

The youthfulness of the combatants was the great source of attraction, and the notice of the entertainment was no sooner posted in the Forum, one morning at the commencement of July, than several people prepared to bet heavily upon the one or the other.

In a gymnasium close at hand, attached to the establishment of the lanista, the gladiators were accustomed to exercise themselves in preparation for the coming contest, when life or death would depend upon their skill; and, with certain limitations, the public were admitted to behold them, and to make their bets as they happened to prefer one competitor or the other.

Here a number of people repaired immediately after they had read the notification, and according as they were known or *not* known to the keeper of the door, or according to their appearance, were admitted.

The building was a substantial erection of stone, under a lofty roof, poles, leaping bars, ropes of various forms, abounding, as in a modern gymnasium; but the rows of deadly weapons, suspended from the wall, showed the more serious nature of the preparations.

Lutatius stood near the centre of the arena, which was covered with saw-dust, and encircled with a ring to prevent people from pressing too closely on the combatants.

Within the ring, stripped naked to the waist, stood the two youths, whose promised appearance excited so much sensation.

Evanus appeared to have completely recovered from the severe scourging he had received, although his back was grievously disfigured by the scars.

The mode of dealing with such wounds was, however, well known to Lutatius, who was anxious to make the appearance of the young combatant as attractive as possible, for a great deal depended upon effect. His face was, alas, rapidly losing the look of boyish, trustful innocence it had once possessed, and an expression of recklessness overspread it.

He was, however, determined to do his best in his new vocation. Firstly, it recommended itself far more to his taste, in spite of its dangers, than the galling slavery in the house of Terentius; and, secondly, he was about to contend for a great prize, —the "Pileus," or cap, bestowed upon conquering gladiators, if slaves, as a token of freedom obtained by bravery. And as Lutatius expected to make much gain by the coming contest, he had promised freedom to the victor, although he would still have to appear as a gladiator when called upon, until gifted also with the "Rudes," a rod, or wooden sword, when he could never be called out again, without his own consent.

For this prize Evanus was fully prepared to contend, even to the death.

His opponent, Alfric, was a young German, lately taken a captive in an incursion of the Romans over the Rhine, and, on account of his personal beauty and development of muscle, bought at a very high price by Lutatius, who had not hitherto found a similar antagonist, with whom to match him.

The young German was tall and well made, perhaps a little the taller of the two, but he lacked the activity and suppleness which characterized every movement of Evanus, although perhaps Alfric was more than the equal of his rival in strength, and not wanting in dexterity; on the whole he was a very fair match for his opponent, and the beauty of his features, his fair hair, almost flaxen, and his blue eyes, were sure to engage the sympathies of the ladies, who, alas! would form a large portion of the spectators of his final prowess. There was indeed something positively engaging in his countenance, which was however acquiring the reckless expression so characteristic of the class to which he now belonged. Like Evanus he longed eagerly for liberty, and was ready to dare all to obtain it.

The eager spectators now surrounded the ring, made the combatants stretch forth their arms, strike blows at imaginary opponents, and finally engage each other with gloves, or the naked fists, while they made their comments and decided upon which side to bet.

"I like the German," said one; "see how firm he is upon his legs, and what muscle; why, he is a very Achilles!"

"And I the Caledonian," said another; "why, he is as quick in his movements as a tiger!"

"Better let him fight the tiger at Tamesis, then."

"Just what I should like to see, my good Bassus;

but Constantius is in the way, he forbids us to give our own slaves to the beasts, without what he calls sufficient cause, or to expose criminals who have not committed capital offences, and, alas, Durocina has produced no criminals; now, if we could but find a Christian!"

"They are not very hard to find," said Lutatius, clapping him on the back, "by Jupiter I would undertake to hunt up one within twenty-four hours; but what good would it be, Constantius has declared he will permit no more executions of these miscreants."

"More is the pity."

"And for that matter our future Augustus, Constantine, is as bad."

"How do you know he will be your Augustus?" said a singular voice, "woe to your amphitheatres, and to your temples, if he ever sways the realm!"

A singular feeling pervaded the whole body of spectators, and they gazed upon the speaker.

He wore the common dress, a tunic, but richly ornamented, and his dark olive complexion, his sparkling eye, his accent, all spoke of Italy, and all proclaimed the patrician; he was a stranger to those present, save Lutatius, and that electric-like influence which sometimes warns men instinctively that there is danger in a certain character spoke forcibly enough now.

"But we are interrupting the boys," said the stranger "I was studying their capabilities like yourselves."

Even this mimic warfare was not altogether bloodless, and when the spectators perceived that the youthful boxers were tired, they allowed them to give place to other intending combatants, who performed with the broad sword or the foil for thrusting.

There was no feeling of animosity in the minds of either Evanus or Alfric, and yet there was a feeling of restraint; they felt that it was a contest for life or death between them, and their communications were much of the character those duellists might have who were forced, in former days, to comply with the formal etiquette of society, and to fight with but little hatred at heart.

There was little or no restraint placed upon the young slaves; it was almost impossible for them to escape; there were professionals, called fugitivarii, whose especial business it was to track runaways, who scarcely ever failed, and the laws regulating travelling and passports were especially framed so as to make it almost impossible for a slave to escape. Again, the punishments inflicted were so fearfully severe, that even a brave man might hesitate to chance incurring them.

And on this afternoon, discharged from further attendance, Evanus left the town, and strolled along the banks of the river past the villas of the opulent citizens who inhabited suburban homes towards the west.

About a mile from the town, the bank rose high above the river, and there was a shady grove surrounded by fine elms. Evanus seated himself behind one of these, looking over the river towards the twin hills, which rose before him, and over the richly cultivated grounds which occupied the opposite bank, towards the setting sun, which was already sinking behind the heavily-laden stalks of golden corn.

It was almost the first time he had been alone since he had entered his new profession, and as he sat and watched the declining sun, he mused deeply upon his present lot.

"I cannot help it," he said bitterly to himself, as if in answer to some inward promptings, "it is my only road to liberty; I *must* be free."

In vain did he strive to repress the feelings which were agitating his bosom, and which indeed had never wholly slumbered there,—the dim belief in lessons he had learned at a mother's knee, concerning the love due from man to man, and from man to his God, and concerning that tremendous problem—the endless future, which would thrust itself upon the heathen mind, in the midst of its deathly sleep, and *would* not be silenced.

"What can it matter if I fail? it will be only *nothingness*."

"Fool," seemed to say a voice, repeating early lessons, "look at that setting sun, it dies, will it not rise again? look at these withering leaves, when winter has killed them will not the trees awake to new life?"

"Better death than slavery."

"Yes, death! but what follows death, what?"

Thus a voice, perhaps sent in answer to a mother's prayers, pursued him, and he was about to rise up, and shake off thought in action, when he heard steps approaching through the grove, and caught the sound of voices.

He knew them,—at least, one was the voice of Lutatius, and the other,—it was that of the mysterious stranger whose tones had struck even him in the gymnasium.

The speakers were talking in subdued tones as they advanced up the grove, yet not so subdued but that their voices reached Evanus, and forced themselves upon his attention, as he sat separated from them by the intervening foliage.

"The risk is frightful," said Lutatius.

"Frightful!" said the stranger; "a strange word for an old gladiator like you to use, who have endangered your life so often on the arena."

"Yes, but that was all fair play."

"Greater risk, greater profit; Maxentius* will not be sparing in his reward."

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* See *Note M.*

"But will Maxentius possess the power?"

"Yes; his father, Maximian, so lately Augustus, but forced into resignation by his colleague, Diocletian, groans over the degradation, which through the injustice of Galerius, who has appointed other Cæsars, neglecting Maxentius, affects his son also. Therefore, two Prætorian tribunes, with all the guards under their influence, intend to massacre the usurping Cæsar, Severus, and all who belong to him, and to place Maxentius on the imperial throne."

Here the voices became inaudible, until the speakers, having reached the end of the grove, returned, and again came within hearing.

"Maxentius wills to be universal emperor, and Constantine is in his way," said the stranger, in apparent answer to a question from Lutatius.

"You mean the *Augustus* Constantius."

"He will never trouble men more."

"What do you mean?"

"He is dead!"

"What, Constantius dead?"

"Yes, he died at York three days ago."

"Then Constantine will succeed him?"

"Yes, if we prevent not. Mark you, if Constantine does succeed his father, there will be an end to the worship of the gods, and very soon to the sports of the amphitheatre; for Constantine's mother, Helena, is a Christian, and the son is but too much addicted to that detestable superstition;

he only awaits the period when he can declare himself with safety."

"But if he is Augustus, and I can hardly realize the fact, our task becomes harder than ever."

"An emperor has as soft a throat as any other man, and as penetrable to steel."

"But the risk is far greater."

"Not so great as if his father were still living to avenge him."

Here once more their voices became inaudible. Lutatius was speaking as they returned.

"That is true; but first of all, what means do you propose to adopt?"

"Constantine will make a progress through the South when he has buried his father, and will come to Durocina; he will lodge at the villa of his mother, Helena, up the stream here."

"Very likely indeed; what then?"

"He must never leave it alive."

"But how to prevent it?"

"They will need extra attendants for the banquet, and so on; you must provide one, and—"

Here the voices became inaudible again.

"Yes, I marked him;" the stranger continued, as they came opposite the tree once more; "the youth has consummate courage, a pleasing address, and can easily be stimulated by his hatred to Rome, and to Constantine in particular, who has just subdued his countrymen."

"But he may fall in the approaching games."

"You must prevent that; there are hundreds of ways—"

Once more the voices became inaudible, keenly as Evanus listened.

Again they were opposite him.

"The government of a province would be a small reward; the deed done, you must seek Italy at once with me, and if we are pursued we can easily escape by securing relays of post horses along the road to Anderida, where I have a bark awaiting me."

"Well I will make the attempt, and will give the matter all the consideration during the interval before the games. You say he will be here in September?"

"At the latest."

The speakers left the grove, and retraced their steps homeward.

Not until all was perfectly safe, and the last sound of their footsteps had died away, did Evanus leave his retreat, and follow at a safe distance till he entered the city.

As he approached it he became aware that news of great importance had reached it; the people were collecting in crowds in the forum; the cry, "Have you heard the news?" passed from lip to lip, and the simple answer seemed to fill the air,—

"Constantius is dead!"

CHAPTER V.

ALFRIC.

CONSTANTIUS was indeed no more! his firm and able rule in Britain was ended. Called to the throne of the west in a critical moment, when the defeat and death of Allectus, the murderer of the great usurper Carausius, had once more united Britain to the empire, he had swayed the island colony for ten years with judgment tempered by mercy.

His gallant son, Constantine, was absent with Galerius in the east, and with difficulty gained permission to visit his dying father, who, feeling his end draw near, expressed, by repeated letters, his anxiety to embrace his only son. But so greatly did the fierce Galerius, the persecutor of the Church, dread the rising talent and valour of the future Christian emperor, that he evaded the request of Constantine to the last moment, and even when the passport was drawn out and signed, is said to have kept it under his pillow, whence it was abstracted by Constantine during the night.

Travelling with incredible diligence, he outstripped all pursuit, traversed Thrace, Dacia, Italy, and Gaul, and arrived at Portus Itius just as his father was returning thence to Britain to die.

Accompanying him over the channel, on his last voyage, he conducted a short but victorious campaign against the Caledonians, and returned to York in time to receive his dying father's embraces.

The death of Constantius was immediately followed by the elevation of Constantine to the rank of Augustus (or emperor) of the west, in spite of the known opposition, not only of Galerius, but of all the pretenders to dominion in Italy and the east.

But Constantine well knew that if he wanted to live he must consent to reign, and the affection of the legions who had followed him to Britain, and who comprised the flower of the western armies, sufficiently justified his determination, according to the ideas of that age.

We must now return to our subject.

Had not the whole energies of Evanus been engaged in preparation for the coming games, his thoughts would have doubtless dwelt continually upon the mysterious interview he had witnessed in the grove, and the conversation which seemed to refer so pointedly to himself. But he knew the danger which would accompany any attempt to pry further into the doings of his master, the lanista, and that death would be the immediate result of any suspicion on Lutatius's part of the fidelity of his slave. He had only to wait; if the day left him the conqueror, why he was no longer a slave, and could assert the right of self control, and if *not*, why there was an end of everything.

So he spent the whole time at his disposal in such exercises as best fitted him for the dangerous encounter; he boxed daily with Alfric, and trained his muscles to sustain the weight of the cestus with ease.

The two combatants were so well matched that betting was about equal upon them; but towards the end of the month, Lutatius forbade them to practise together any more, and began himself to give them private lessons.

But it was evident that the lanista was deeply interested in the success of Evanus, and that if it were in his power, he would secure *him* the victory.

"You must know," he said, one day when alone with his protégé, after an arduous lesson, "that I myself have betted heavily upon you, and that if you fail I shall be considerably the loser."

"In that case I shall not live to see it."

"No, the cestus is generally, not always, fatal; but if you will remember the trick I have just taught you, I think you cannot fail to crush your opponent's skull; when you get his hands in the position I have pointed out, which a little manœuvring will secure, you have only to make the feint I just showed you, and there will be a direct opening to his forehead; go in like a flash of lightning and win."

"But have you not told him of the danger in giving him *his* lessons?"

Lutatius hesitated, and then said,—"Did I not tell you that your life and my success are identical? It will be your life or his; and remember success brings you your freedom."

The eyes of Evanus sparkled, as he said,—

"It is the one thing I would die for."

"You mean *live* for; it would not be much good on the banks of the Styx; and, if I may ask you, what is the next thing you desire after freedom?"

"I cannot tell you, you are a Roman."

"Not altogether; my mother was a Briton, or I might say a Caledonian by descent."

"Then you may understand my meaning."

"I think I understand it, for I know your history, —a devastated home, given to fire and sword,—a father and mother slain."

"Do not remind me of that now, I cannot bear it."

"Not even if I point out to you the means of revenge?"

"Yes, I can bear it then."

"Do you know who was the conqueror of your people?"

"Yes, Constantine."

"Did you ever see him?"

"No."

"Well, you will see him soon; he will grace the approaching games with his presence; he is about to make a progress through Southern Britain, to gain the affections of his subjects, before making a cast for *universal* empire or death; suppose the latter anticipates him."

"But how?"

"He will sleep at the villa which lies upon the river side, two or three miles up the stream amongst the woods; it belongs to his mother, the Empress Helena, who already is expecting him there; she is in residence now, as you may have heard."

Evanus listened intently; he remembered the conversation in the grove.

"They intend to give a banquet the evening after the games, and will require attendants from the city in addition to the household slaves; will you be one?"

"What, wait upon him?"

"Yes, that you may avenge your father."

"Explain your meaning."

"It is simply this: to open the doors at midnight. Can you use a dagger?"

"Try me."

"It may be required; perhaps you may yourself strike the blow which avenges your country and your father at the same moment; is the bribe sufficient?"

"If I avenge them I die happy."

"Yes, but there is plenty of time yet before you need talk of dying; horses will await the three of us without the villa; we ride direct for the coast, and sail for Italy, where the future emperor of the world, Maxentius, the son of Maximilian, will receive us with open arms, and a life of unbounded wealth and power may be yours."

"I want no other reward than to know I have avenged my father."

"As you like," said Lutatius, and the conversation terminated.

It may be thought that Lutatius was absolutely putting himself in the power of his slave, such, however, was not the case. Had Evanus gone at once to the prefect of the city, Tigurinus, and reported the conversation, nothing would, probably, have come of it but his own death; a slave's evidence could not by law be received against his master, and the penalty of volunteering such information was usually death, but even if that difficulty were overcome, the usual way of taking the evidence of a slave in any criminal case was under the torture, without which it was as valueless as modern evidence without oath. It was not likely, in such a case, that any slave would volunteer to be a witness with the probability of being delivered up to his master, to suffer any penalty the latter chose to inflict, so soon as the object of the accusation was discovered.

Slaves had too much reason to hate their masters to be trusted when they gave evidence against them.

But apart from all this, Lutatius had read the very heart of his slave.

Alas! poor Evanus, he was rapidly losing all that was bright and good in his character, yet when Lutatius had gone, that voice which had never ceased to plead in his ears, repeated words he had heard in the happy past, from the dear lips which, as he supposed, were closed for ever in silence. "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. If thine enemy hunger feed him, if he thirst give him drink; for thus doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.*" Then, to drown this still small voice, came the remembrance of the songs of the bards, clothing in music and poetry the glory of revenge, the joy of striking the Roman foe.

"I was false to my country once, and what came of it? Is not my present condition a proof that I did wrongly? I may atone for it by one bold deed; my countrymen will forgive me then, or, if I fall, will honour my memory."

So the conflicting passions fought for victory, and alas! the thirst for vengeance threatened to prevail.

The day before the one fixed for the games dawned at last; the morning passed in receiving the last lessons, after which the muscles were to rest till the final encounter.

It was evening, and Evanus wandered alone in the hills and woods, meditating on the past and the future before him; he was again the prey of conflicting motions, which yet contended fiercely for the victory; but he resolutely stifled the voice of conscience, if, as he said to himself, it *was* the *voice*, for he really doubted.

He wandered over the hills rising to the south of the river, scaled their twin summits, and plunged into the copsewood which then, as now, fringed their base. A procession of boats was passing up the river with silken streamers, and sweet music floating upon the air; he gazed with intense interest, for the thought struck him, it might be the emperor, who was expected that day at the villa up the stream, which he could see crowning an elevation rising on the north bank of the river, surrounded by beautiful woodland scenes.

He crossed the river by a foot bridge, and returned to the city. Entering the gates, he gazed with wandering eyes upon the beautiful buildings which lined the well paved streets on each side. He entered the forum, and looked upon the busy throng who passed and repassed; he heard the remarks, "That is the young Caledonian who contends with the cestus to-morrow," and perhaps felt some little pride at being the object of such universal interest.

The open doors of the Temple of Jupiter invited him to enter and enjoy the cool shade. He marked the altar, with its inscription, "Jovi optimo maximo, et numinibus Augusti,"* which had been placed there by Marcus Varus Severus in devotion to his country's gods. A sacrifice was about to be offered, and he saw the approach of the victim and the white-robed flamen; but he lingered not, for the gods of Rome were hateful to him, either from his father's point of view or that of his mother.

He gazed now upon the beautiful exterior of the amphitheatre, with its facings of bright white stone, brought from Aquæ Solis (Bath), and entered by one of the open vomitoria; he stood upon the centre of the arena, and a vivid anticipation of the morrow's scene came upon him as he gazed around him, and thought that by the sunset of the morrow the sands around might have drunk his blood.

The sunset and the bright harvest moon silvered palace, amphitheatre, and temple in her rays, as he returned to the house of the lanista, where his frugal supper awaited him.

Lutatius was visiting the apartments set apart for his gladiators.

"Be of good cheer," he said, as he wished Evanus

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* *See Note N.*

a good night; "you are sure to win; try to sleep well."

It was a long dormitory, with low couches, upon which several of the household slaves reposed. Alfric occupied the opposite bed.

Throwing himself upon his own couch, Evanus slept until midnight, when he awoke; the moonbeams were flooding the dormitory with light, they fell full upon the opposite bed, upon the upturned fair face of his opponent,—upon that forehead which . . . . . well, Evanus could not then pursue the thought; they had eaten, drunk, and conversed together as friends, and now they were to fight to the death,—why?—for the amusement of an effeminate populace.

He rose, and went to the window, unable to sleep, and looked out upon the meadows beyond the town, and the Isis flowing placidly by in the distance, as its waters reflected the moonbeams.

How sweetly the moonlight slept on those peaceful waters! how bright the summits of the hills appeared in its silver light! how fair the earth seemed, which he was about, perhaps, to leave for ever!

Fair, indeed, but often had his mother pointed the moral,—if the works of His hands are so fair, what must their Creator be? Was he about to violate the laws of that Creator? He was trying once more to stifle the thought, when Alfric stood by his side.

"Looking at the moonlight, Evanus? It will be the last time for one of us; but it does not matter, for in any case it will be the better for us both."

"How for us both?" said Evanus; "we cannot both win."

"It will be at least liberty for both; the liberty of death or of life; better that of *death* than slavery."

"Do you feel the bitterness of slavery so strongly?"

"Ah, indeed, I do; look at that lovely river as the light falls upon it; it reminds me of my own dear Rhine, near which I dwelt, till these Romans kidnapped me, and of my father and mother, who yet mourn over their child."

"Are your father and mother living?"

"Yes; at least, I hope so. I was taken a prisoner in an excursion some Roman robbers made to kidnap slaves, in a time of profound peace, or else they would not have dared to enter our forests, the cowards; our warriors would have driven them away like chaff before the wind; but they scorn to observe treaties, and once in their hands all was over; they fled with the booty they had obtained, dragging me and others with them, and escaped pursuit."

"But where were you when seized?"

"With a small party of lads like myself, enjoying ourselves in the woods; they came suddenly upon us, and although some escaped I was taken, exposed for sale as a slave, and bought by Lutatius."

"The wretches," said Evanus. "Alfric, I have no father or mother living; I almost hope you will win to-morrow; you may then see them once more."

"No, Evanus, we must each do our best; but let there be no animosity about it; I forgive you beforehand if you kill me, and you will do the same in case I should succeed."

"I do, indeed," said Evanus, whose impulsive feelings were strangely moved, as he placed his arm round the neck of his companion; "these Romans . . . . . oh! if we live either of us, let it be for vengeance."

"It shall be if *I* live," said Alfric. "I know a valley deep in our German wildernesses, between two lofty heights, with a narrow opening at each end; it is whitened with Roman bones; there we entrapped Varus and his legions in the days of old, and they perished like dogs; they have never penetrated very deeply into our land since, and we are yet free men."

"Would that every Roman, or slave to the Romans, like these southern Britons, might likewise perish," said Evanus, fiercely. "If ever I should stand in my father's place, never will I spare one."

"Their end will come; our old men say that the empire is even now tottering towards its fall, and that it will yet be the lot of the men they call "barbarians" to riot in their palaces, and lay their proud cities in ruin; curses upon them, they have been the foes of every nation, the destroyers of liberty, the oppressors of mankind; whichever of us falls to-morrow, his blood will be on their heads, not on the survivor's, and let the conqueror avenge the conquered."

"Even so let it be," said Evanus; "I swear it."

"And I."

"We must part now; let us clasp each other for the last time in friendly embrace, before we meet in the death struggle."

And the two boys, thus strangely brought together, embraced as brothers, and almost with tears in their eyes sought their pallets.

Sleep visited their couches, and the still hours of the night rolled away, broken only by the occasional tramp of some solitary nocturnal wayfarer, or the distant call of the sentinel on the ramparts.

Sleep, the image of that last sleep, which has so long stilled the throbbing hearts, and buried the seething passions, of those who lived and moved, sinned and suffered, in that distant day, where now the English labourer seeks his daily bread all unconscious of the past, and the hallowing influences of Christianity have banished for ever the fierce pleasures and the grievous woes of Paganism.

CHAPTER VI.

The Cestus.

THE morning dawned, that fatal morning to the few, the morning of joy to the many; and from all the outlying villages, hamlets, or suburban villas, the multitudes poured through the gates of Durocina.

They came up the river from Tamesis in large parties by boat; they crowded the road which, leading from the Icknield street, brought crowds from the villages along the range of hills traversed by the main road; they crossed the river as they came from the towns on the Via Strata, the great western road, by the cross road from Streatley, now so called; they descended the river from the villages and villas which lined its banks as thickly as now, but whose very names have perished, so completely did the subsequent flood of Saxon devastation obliterate the past.

The town was flooded with life, as when a modern fair collects its rustic multitudes; and from the early dawn the locarii took their places, to vacate them, for a consideration, to rich late comers, and the multitude, the young and the old, of both sexes, filled the ranges of seats around the arena.

The place of honour, usually occupied by the president, the chief magistrate of the city, was yet vacant, and it had been specially adorned, as if awaiting an occupant of high rank; and the people looked and repeated the word "Constantine."

But the hour for the commencement of the games arrived, and he was not there, when a herald from his mother's villa arriving, bid the games commence, giving the information that the Imperator would arrive ere the close of the sports, but was now detained by pressing business.

The prefect took his seat; a herald announced that the whole expense of the day's games would be borne by Constantine,—that large rewards would be on this occasion given to the conquerors if freemen,—liberty if slaves; and amidst the thundering acclamations of the people the games began, following the order of the Libelli, or programmes, previously issued.

The auctorati, or freemen, who became gladiators for hire, commenced the sports with the "prælusio," or encounter with wooden swords, during which the people made their bets.

Then bright swords of steel were supplied, and after their edges, tempered to the keenness of a razor, had been examined by the lanista, the mortal encounter began.

The first act of the scene was over; Catervarii had fought in troops; Andabatæ, blindfolded; Hoplomachi, clad in complete armour, with huge weapons; and the Samnites, so-called from the fashion of their arms.

During its continuance, the professional gladiators, who formed the property of the lanista, and were known as the familia, had been ranged along the sides of the arena, beholding the conflicts, and awaiting in calmness their own turn; they had heard the repeated cries of "Habet," as gladiator after gladiator received the disabling or mortal thrust; they were reserved themselves for the more deadly encounter, for it was designed that the games should increase each hour in interest; and up to this time, although there had been much bloodshed, the people had been merciful, and no vanquished combatant had appealed to their mercy in vain.

It was an oft observed fact, in connection with these games, that the earlier combatants were more frequently spared by the populace, who had the decision of their fate, than the later, as if the sight of blood hardened the mind, and destroyed the feelings of mercy and pity.

The second act of the games commenced; the gladiators of the family marched in procession round the arena, two and two, as they were to fight; the Thracians, so-called, who contended with short sword and shield; the retiarius and secutor; the combatants with the deadly foil; the essedarii, who were to perform the last act of the games; and the boxers with the cestus,—Evanus and Alfric,—who had to fight immediately; combatants with the more deadly weapons succeeding.

The cestus was, however, a sufficiently *deadly* weapon, and when, amidst the shouts of the crowd, the two youths stood forth, and the bands of leather were so bound round the fists, as to exhibit knots, nails, and plummets of lead over the knuckles, there were few who would have thought the combat less likely to kill than the encounter with the more deadly weapons (so called).

Once Evanus gazed around; the faces of the audience, fixed in intense interest, met his view: there was old Hispalus, the slave-dealer, whose scourge he had tasted so often,—there were Terentius and Lucius, who had betted heavily upon Alfric,—there was the old Heliodorus, with his hooked nose and olive face,—there was the stranger he had seen in the grove, his eyes fixed intently on the boy, as he sat in the seat appropriated to those of knightly rank.

Evanus withdrew his eyes almost timidly, and his heart beat tumultuously as he gazed upon Alfric whose fair pale face, met his, with an expression which spoke volumes and made Evanus feel reluctant to engage in the combat.

It was but for a moment; the thought of the last words the night before, of the forgiveness which had passed between them; all passed away, as with the words on his lips, "we must each do our best, and the survivor shall avenge the fallen," he faced his opponent.

The suspense before the first blow seemed intolerable ; it was not long, the lanista gave the signal as he stood near them on the sand of the arena ; they approached each other, struck, parried the first blows successfully, moved round each other, watching for an opening with eager looks. Quick as a flash of lightning came a blow from Alfric, and reaching Evanus in an unguarded moment, tore open the left shoulder, without however injuring sinew or bone. It supplied an incentive, wanting previously, the feeling which animates the combatant in deadly combat, as distinct from the mere boxer ; and, smarting with the pain, Evanus returned the blow, before his antagonist had fully recovered guard, Alfric sank on one knee, the blow grazed his head ; the combatants were getting warmed with the combat,—they thought less of defence, more of attack,—they fought now as deadly enemies would fight : Evanus received another blow on his chest, which almost deprived him of breath ; and now he watched eagerly for the opening Lutatius had bidden him specially seek. He simply parried the blows for a few minutes, in such a manner as to get the hands of his opponent into the position the lanista had indicated ; the moment came,—with a sudden movement of his left arm, he broke down his opponent's guard, and rushing in with his right throwing all his weight and force into the blow, his heavily loaded fist fell fully upon the fair broad forehead of his opponent, crushing in the bone.

Poor Alfric sank, or rather collapsed, and Evanus fell over him, unable to recover his balance; he rose covered with dust and blood,—the blood of his opponent; the people shouted and cheered; the ladies, yes the ladies! showered flowers from the seats and balconies, but he recked not of it,—he saw the boy he had embraced in friendship the night before, raise himself feebly on one arm, look him full in the face with a look in which there was no hatred, no revenge, but forgiveness as legibly written as in a book; he thought the lips framed the word "remember" as he reeled himself, and was borne by the lanista and attendants from the arena, just as the shout "Constantine! Constantine!" rose from a hundred lips, and the Emperor of the West, took the place of Tigurinus, the presiding magistrate, who stood humbly at his right hand.

What scenes passed before the mental vision of the dying Alfric? Was it his German home, the playmates of his youth, his fond mother, his brave father, the thousand endearments of home? yes, his spirit was fast leaving earth, and the arena was *already* left for ever; for those who stood near him, heard, alas, with unsympathizing and careless ears, the few last broken words, spoken as if to the dear ones afar off, and they heard no more!

Meanwhile in the bosom of the victor, scarcely grateful that he was the survivor, all other feelings were merging into one absorbing passion,—Hatred of Rome, and desire of vengeance; it was not he but Rome which had slain Alfric, and he felt himself debased in having been the instrument.

Alas, every changing scene of his late career as yet was but obliterating the image of God in his person, and yet even in his faults, there was nothing paltry or mean, they were the result of the tragical events we have described, acting upon a free, passionate, and impulsive nature, and at last almost deifying vengeance, which had fixed her shrine now in his very heart.

He heard the shouts "Constantine! Constantine!" but he heeded not as he lay on a rude couch in a chamber beneath the seats of the amphitheatre; his thoughts were of the desolate house, of which Alfric had told him the night before, and he strove to forget his own share in its desolation, by transferring the responsibility to Rome, and flattering himself with the hope of vengeance,—that vengeance which his dead opponent and he had sworn together.

Once the thought struck him, had the fight been fair; but for the special instructions of the lanista, he might not, nay would not, have conquered; but yet he felt that otherwise, the superior strength of his opponent, would have given him the greater chance, and he strove to think all had been fairly arranged, for the other possibility pained him.

While he was still in this frame of mind, the closing cheers of the populace, told him, that they were leaving the scene; he could hear them, outside the window of the little chamber, reckoning their gains, and eulogizing the skill of the successful combatants.

Lutatius entered.

"Well Evanus, I congratulate you upon your acquired freedom."

"It has been dearly bought; poor Alfric!"

"Why as to that, one man's meat is another man's poison, they say, and till we reach the shades below, it always will be so."

"The Emperor, is he here?"

"Yes, and he has asked to see you, amongst the other victors; we told him you were too ill. Ha! ha! perhaps he may see you unexpectedly tonight."

"I am ready."

"Well, Stephanus, the butler of the Empress, has come to the town, to see about additional help for the slaves who are to administer at the banquet to-night; are you disabled?"

No, the blow hurt my shoulder, but it was my left one; the blow in the chest was a spent blow although it hurt at the time."

"You must go to the villa soon, come with me and take a bath first, I will provide you with a fitting dress, this is your pileus, it typifies your freedom; the dress of slavery is put aside for ever."

They left the amphitheatre, and made their way by secluded paths to the baths,—yet not so secluded but that they were marked, and cheered repeatedly by the mob.

By the way, Evanus asked his companion a few questions concerning the plans by which the scheme was to be carried out, and he learned the following details:

Maxentius, hoping to attain universal dominion, had made up his mind to remove Constantine, as a dangerous competitor for the imperial crown; but, strong as the latter was in the affections of the western legions, he could only trust to guile and treachery, in the absence of other means.

The stranger so often introduced to our readers whose name was Pompeianus, had accordingly been despatched to Britain, bearing letters testimonial which secured him admittance to good society, and gold sufficient to corrupt a legion.

Discovering an old acquaintance in Lutatius, he had at once sounded him, and finding him pliable, determined upon the plans to be carried out in conjunction with him, with which our readers are already acquainted.

Stephanus, the butler at the suburban villa of Helena, was already secured by bribes, but shrinking from any active part in the coming tragedy, he was only willing to put others in possession of the necessary means.

The activity of Pompeianus, aided by gold, had secured the means of successful flight; post horses would be waiting at the ford below the villa, and relays had been secured in advance at every station on the road, until the coast was reached at Anderida.

Thus far Lutatius, when they arrived at the baths. Refreshed by the long process, which was not altogether unlike the modern Turkish bath, and feeling another being in point of physical strength. Evanus left in company with Lutatius.

"Would you like to see the last of your antagonist?" asked the lanista.

"Are they about to perform the funereal rites?" replied Evanus, sadly.

"Yes, it is a point on which I find my familia rather exacting; they are sadly afraid lest old Charon should keep them waiting on the banks of the Styx before he gives them admittance to his crazy old bark."

Making no reply, Evanus followed his patron.

Outside the city, near where the magnificent abbey church was raised in later ages, was the place of burning.

Here the corpse of the ill-fated Alfric was already placed upon the funeral pile, which was built in the form of an ancient altar, with four equal sides.

It was the duty of the nearest relation to fire the pile, but in the absence of any such person the gladiators, as if to show the utter absence of animosity in their combats, frequently selected the slayer to perform the last duty, and seeing Evanus they made way for him silently.

With trembling hands, he performed the office, averting his face as he did so ; the flames rose ; perfumes were cast into the fire, the *cestus* the deceased had worn, the favourite articles of property which he had possessed. When the flames had subsided, the embers were soaked in wine, the bones and ashes were gathered up by the surviving gladiators, sprinkled again with perfumes, and then placed in an urn of earthenware.

Then the *flamen* who attended sprinkled those present with pure water from a branch of laurel, and dismissed them, solemnly pronouncing the words, "*Ire licet.*"

"*Vale, vale,*" they cried. "*Vale,*" said Evanus, the tears unbidden starting to his eyes, but indignantly wiped away, as if they degraded him and the dead alike.

One hour later, Lutatius called Evanus to his private chamber ; a bright dagger lay on the table, the letter "C" engraved upon the blade.

"Do you see that dagger ?" asked the lanista.

"Yes."

"It was given to me by Hispalus," he said ; "he gave a high price for it to a Roman soldier, who boasted it had drunk the blood of a noted Caledonian chieftain called Aëdh."

The eyes of Evanus glistened; he stretched his trembling hands out to clutch the weapon.

"Let blood wash out blood," said Lutatius; "Stephanus awaits you."

The last feeling of reluctance was removed, a father's blood seemed to call for vengeance, and the unhappy boy yielded himself, heart and soul, to the murderous impulse, not as one about to commit a crime, but as one about to perform a high and holy duty, one for which bards would sing his praise to unborn generations.

CHAPTER VII.

ABOUT three miles up the stream, above the city, the river made a sudden bend in its course, and just below the bend cliffs rose precipitously from its bed, clothed with wood, and surmounted by a closely shaven lawn of verdant grass, terminating a gentle acclivity rising from the eastward.

Upon this lovely spot was placed the villa of the Empress Helena;* whose memory was long cherished in the neighbourhood, where, after her pious life and saintly death, she reserved the appellation of Saint Helen, churches being dedicated in her honour.

But, at the time of which we write, fame had not yet inscribed her name so legibly in its book; she was known as a British lady of rank, born at Colchester, then known as Camalodunum, who had married Constantius, before he attained the title of Augustus, and had become the mother of Constantine, the favourite hero of the Roman legions. But her exalted rank had not spared her from deep trials. When her husband received the imperial dignity, political motives, urged by Diocletian, caused a legal separation between him and his wife, and, in consequence, Constantine himself had preferred

* See *Note O.*

serving with Galerius in the east to the sharing his father's perils in the west, and they only met again when the father drew near his end, as we have recorded. And Helena, abandoning the pomp of cities, found refuge in the quiet retreat we are describing, where her religion ministered consolation, and spoke of a changeless Friend.

It was but a small villa, considering the station of its occupant, furnished simply, but with exquisite taste, and commanding from its terraces most lovely views of the surrounding neighbourhood, the Isis winding like a silver thread through richly cultivated scenery; the twin hills and the ridge westward which terminated the view, dotted here and there with villas, or clothed with woods, which the variegated hues of autumn were already brightening.

The atrium and peristylium, as also the colonnade in front of the mansion, were adorned with the costliest marbles, with matchless works of art, with rare plants of beautiful form and the sweetest odour, but although there were statues of living and departed heroes, yet neither Jupiter, nor any of his mythological family, made their unhallowed appearance. For the Empress Helena was, as we have seen, a Christian, and although she had been unable to obtain toleration to the full extent for her brethren in the Faith, yet she had won the fullest permission for the secret exercise of their religious duties, both from her departed husband

and her gallant son, and extended her protection, as far as she was able, to all around her.

It was, perhaps, the knowledge of the Faith he had derived from her which had caused Constantius to forbid any further infliction of torture or death upon the Christians, in his dominions after Diocletian had ceased to hold the reins of empire, in the year 305 A.D.

There was a little oratory, or chapel, duly furnished, in her villa, where a Christian priest daily celebrated the Holy Mysteries, and where the scattered members of the flock of Christ were permitted to repair as occasion served. The whole household was Christian, and now the fact was no longer a secret, for all the authorities had ceased to put the persecuting edicts in force, although for a few years longer they remained law.

But upon the day in question the household was deprived of its customary tranquility by the presence of the Emperor, who, attended only by his secretary, Lucilianus, fearing no danger in Britain, was the honoured guest.

It is needless to say that no members of the family were present at the bloody sports of the city save only the Emperor himself, who a few years later issued an edict for their total suppression; but we must not anticipate.

Of course his presence at the games was a source of regret to Helena, who would willingly have detained him, but dared not press her wishes too strongly in a matter in which Constantine would brook no control; times were not yet ripe for him to risk his popularity, upon which he felt his safety depended in the coming struggle. It must be remembered he was not yet a Christian.

The whole energies of the establishment were meanwhile given to the necessary preparations for the banquet in the evening, and Stephanus, the butler, had been charged to provide hired servants to assist in the various departments of culinary labour and in attendance upon the guests, for many of the chief personages of the neighbourhood had been invited to meet the emperor at the coena, or evening banquet, corresponding very closely in character to a modern dinner.

Early in the evening the Emperor returned to the villa by road, riding with Lucilianus from the city; dismounting, and throwing the reins to an attendant, he sought his mother, who was reclining upon a couch in the garden, enjoying the balmy air of the September evening.

Embracing her fondly, he sat by her side.

Constantine was now in the prime of life, having just completed his thirtieth year, his days had been spent amidst all the vicissitudes of military life, which circumstance had given him that self-command, and power of controlling others, so needful in his difficult position.

His countenance was singularly prepossessing; but the piercing eyes appeared to have the power of reading the very hearts of those upon whom he gazed; the thin lips and massive jaw bespoke power of character; short curling locks of light hair covered his head, and were encircled with a fillet, or band, bound around the otherwise uncovered head.

But there was a look of filial affection, which shone on his face as he addressed his widowed mother, widowed so recently, which spoke volumes in his favour.

She returned his grasp, fondly repressing an unbidden tear which started to her eye.

"Thou hast returned, then; those cruel games are over?"

"I saw but little of them; they had arrived at the last combat when I took my seat, that of the essedarii; patience, dear mother, they give me no pleasure, if that is any relief to you."

She dismissed the subject with a sigh; and they sat in silence for a few minutes; *her* thoughts, and perhaps *his*, were at that recent funeral ceremonial, near the spot where Caernarvon now stands, when the last fond rites had been discharged on behalf of the lost husband and father.

"How is Lucia this afternoon?"

"She is in prayer in the oratory, poor creature. I fear her mind has sustained a very severe shock;

she little resembles the bright, cheerful girl we knew before the Caledonian raid."

"Her lot has been a sad one."

"She would, I think, be better reconciled," continued Helena, "did she know that her boy was dead, as she knows his father is; but it is the uncertainty which is killing her."

"It is very strange," said Constantine, "but I could almost have sworn that I saw her boy to-day; but it is nearly impossible."

"When? how?"

"Just as I reached the amphitheatre, the crowd were shouting over the victor in the combat with the cestus; the vanquished combatant lay dying on the sand,—a mere youth,—and the victor seemed almost as pitiable an object, covered as he was with dust and blood, while the ladies were showering flowers upon him, as he was borne out by the attendant slaves; I scarcely saw his face, but the momentary glimpse I caught startled me."

"Have you taken any steps to learn who he is?"

"Yes; he was not present when I rewarded the victors according to my promise; they said he was too ill; but I have told them to bring him here to-morrow; still, I think it was only a passing fancy."

"Better not say anything about it to Lucia."

"No, for it is most improbable that there is anything in it, and the mention of the passing likeness, which has doubtless deceived me, would only augment her grief. But see, our guests are arriving; we must prepare to receive them."

So the mother and son rose and entered the villa by a side entrance.

The guests continued to arrive: Tigurinus, the magistrate; Terentius, the opulent citizen; men of equestrian or knightly rank, from the villas in the district.

Meanwhile all was excitement amongst the servants; the large tablinum was splendidly decorated, and the villa was resplendent with the brilliant lights, which, shed from lamps burning with costly and perfumed oils, cast a delicious radiance upon marble and flowers, the bright dresses, or the brighter eyes, of their wearers.

The table was now spread, and the guests assembled, each with his mappa, or napkin, and, in his festive dress of bright colour variegated with flowers, a strange contrast to the sober dress of the gentlemen in these days.

They took off their shoes, for the couches were inlaid with ivory and covered with cloth of gold; and the guests lay down to eat, the head resting on the left elbow, which was supported in turn by pillows.

There were several couches around the tables, with intermediate chairs for the ladies, who sat, as in modern days.

Constantine occupied the central position. His mother and Lucia were both present, and the remaining places were filled by the chief residents in the neighbourhood, whether Romans or Romanized Britons: they differed very slightly.

Course after course was brought in, the first called "*promulsis*," made up of stimulants to the appetite; the second of so many dishes that it would far exceed our limits to transcribe them: the river, the preserve, and the air had equally been taxed.

In the midst of the table was placed a hive supported by delicate herbage. To the sound of sweet music, three slaves appeared, dressed with exceeding elegance, and took away the upper part of the dish; beneath appeared a hare with artificial wings, in imitation of the fabled Pegasus, and four figures of satyrs pouring hot sauce upon the fish which appeared as if swimming below. This was the chef d'æuvre of Balbus, the *structor* or arranger of the dishes, and he was exceedingly proud of it.

The third course was the dessert of almonds, grapes, dates, sweetmeats, and confections of all kinds, and apples cooked in a variety of ways.

It was not till this third course, when the guests had already drunk much wine, the produce of Italian vineyards, mixed with water in the *crater*, a large brazen vessel, and transferred thence in the *cyathus*, or ladle, to the glasses of the guests, that the conversation became at all general.

"I never saw a more splendid combat," Tigurinus said; "it did the greatest credit to Lutatius; he must have trained the boys beautifully; that last blow on the forehead was grand, I heard it even where I sat."

"Our lanista at Tamesis," said the prætor of that town, "is somewhat inferior to yours; we had a tiger fight, and he even allowed the man to have the advantage of the tiger, which quite spoiled the sensation."

"I was at Londinium when Carausius had just conquered the Saxon fleet and taken several prisoners," said another; "it was the finest spectacle ever given to the good people; one could hardly have seen anything finer in Rome; the bears gave the best sport,—they hugged the criminals to death grandly."

Constantine seemed anxious to change the subject.

"Who was the boy who was victorious?"

"A Caledonian, most noble Imperator, taken during your recent campaign, when the gods crowned your valour with success, sold by old Hispalus to our Terentius here, and by him to Lutatius."

"Yes, the young villain," Terentius was beginning, when an exclamation from Helena, and the gathering paleness of Lucia, startled the company.

"She has been very ill lately," said Constantine, anxious to divert any possible suspicions of the truth, but himself much moved by this strange confirmation of his impressions in the amphitheatre.

He assisted his mother to bear the half fainting Lucia to the cooler atmosphere of the peristylium. In a short time he returned to the company.

"She is far better now; the fresh air has revived her. So this young athlete was your slave, Terentius?"

"Yes, and he was as bold as a wolf from his native woods; he raised his impious hand against his master, my son Lucius, and, perhaps, had not old Lutatius interceded strongly for him, I might not have spared his life; but I am not naturally cruel, and easily gave way."

"And sold him to Lutatius?"

"Yes; and he has since then spent all his time in acquiring the art in which he proved so proficient to-day."

"But when he first came to you, were there any peculiarities about him worthy of notice?"

"Yes, he was abominably proud, and behaved like one who had been born a king, as perhaps he had, one of those kings whose royal robes consist of a cat-skin around the loins."

"What was his name?"

"He would not give us any name, or, indeed, speak for several days; we called him Evanus."

"Then you know positively nothing of his earlier history?"

"Positively nothing."

"It is very strange. Did old Hispalus, as you call him, say nothing?"

"Yes; there was a report that a great search was made by some person, high in authority, for this Caledonian, and that the soldiers had sold him by stealth to Hispalus for a small consideration; but he pretended to know nothing about him, and said he had been sold 'sub-corona.'"*

"How had he been treated?"

"Badly enough; his back was scarred by the scourges; and, as they said he had attempted to commit suicide, no one would buy him, and I did so almost out of pity, lest old Heliodorus should have him, and badly did he repay me."

"Who is this Heliodorus?"

"An old vulture who bears a bad name amongst us, who hunts the markets for cheap slaves, and whether he manures his fields with them or not no one knows, they disappear."

Constantine made a mental note of the name.

"This Durocina seems a spot of some antiquity."

"Yes, it was held by the sons of Cymbeline,—Caractacus and Togodunus; they thought the legions of Plautius could not cross the river which was swollen, and so, without defending the stream, encamped below the line of earthworks which now

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* See *Note P*.

form the southern defence of the town and separate it from the Campus Martius; but a number of the soldiers swam over, and, getting amongst the chariots and horses on the Campus, threw the whole army into confusion; the divine Vespasian and his brother Sabinus found the ford practicable, and completed the victory, killing Togodunus."

"Plautius, I suppose, first made the place a Roman station?"

"Yes; it was known before as Cair Dauri, and was a British camp."

So the conversation proceeded on desultory subjects, but evidently the Emperor's thoughts were elsewhere, and, although he concealed his impatience, it was with intense relief that he bid the guests farewell at the close of the banquet, and retired to his room, where he found Lucilianus, with a grave face, awaiting him.

What if he had known that the object of all his interest was then concealed in the villa!

Such was indeed the case; amidst the hired attendants, his introduction had been comparatively unnoticed, and Stephanus kept him as much as possible in the background.

It was not considered safe to allow him to bear any share in the labours of the banquet; his previous appearance in the amphitheatre would have made him the subject of universal remark.

He sat in the cubiculum of the treacherous butler, as the darkness gathered, and reclined on the couch to rest, in anticipation of the possible fatigue before him; his shoulder smarted sadly, and his breast was bruised, but the thought of vengeance relieved the pain.

Did any feelings of remorse come upon him?

They were few, and easily quenched by one single and simple operation,—he had but to gaze on the dagger which he was told had drunk his father's blood, and the fierce desire for revenge, the feeling of intense hatred, came over him at once, and obliterated every other sensation whether mental or physical.

He slept even under these circumstances, and did not wake till, at a late hour, Stephanus stood by his side, and bid him arise.

"Follow me; be silent as death."

With naked feet he followed, passed through the passage leading into the peristylium; Stephanus opened a door, and they entered a large chamber, containing a recess in which was a bed, but furnished with a table containing maps, plans, parchments, and writing materials ready at hand. A travelling dress was suspended in one corner, a sword in another, and various insignia sufficiently denoted that the tenant was one of lofty rank.

Pushing aside the heavy curtains which lined the walls, Stephanus unveiled a dark closet sufficient to conceal the person easily, in which garments ordinarily hung.

"This is the Emperor's chamber," he said; "wait here till he is asleep, and then accomplish your mission, whatever it may be."

Evanus entered the recess without a word, his lips were compressed, his face pale, but calm as death, the very grasp of his hand upon the dagger, the tightened muscles, all bespoke intense determination; it seemed manifest that he would succeed in his fell object, or die.

The curtains fell back in their place, and Stephanus left the chamber.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Flight.

IT has been already observed, that when Constantine returned to his chamber for the night, he found Lucilianus awaiting him with a face of portentous gravity.

"What is the matter?" asked the Emperor.

"A strange letter has startled me, which I found on the table in my room,—and I see there is a similar one awaiting you."

"May I see yours?"

Lucilianus extended it, and Constantine read—

"Let the wise servant guard his lord; when men say peace and safety, then cometh swift destruction."

Constantine unwound the triple thread which, guarded by a seal, secured the waxen tablets, and opening them read the following words, engraved by the sharp stylus on the wax—

"Let not sleep rest upon your eyes, or slumber upon your eyelids, until the morning watch; there is a destruction which walketh in darkness."

"It is strange," said Constantine, "but it may be merely the device of one who seeks amusement in exciting the fears of an emperor."

"A dangerous game to play at," said Lucilianus. "My lord and master, let me entreat you to be on your guard, you are but too careless of your safety, you have many foes."

"Not in Britain I trust."

"Is Britain inaccessible to your foes? Think not my lord that Galerius or Maxentius sleep at ease while you live; permit me to set guards around the house; we may trust the domestic slaves, they are Christians and love you for your mother's sake, if not for your own."

"If I mistake not," said Constantine, "the warning is the warning of a Christian; the words indicate as much."

"May I set guards around the mansion?"

"Yes, do as you please; for me I have faced death too often, to be disturbed by this communication."

A low knock was heard at the door.

Lucilianus, at the Emperor's command, opened it, and Helena, leading Lucia—in whom the reader has doubtless already recognised Aithne—by the hand, appeared.

"Constantine, our poor Lucia cannot sleep; she dreams her boy is yet alive; tell her all that you have learned; it is not much, but tell her all?"

"Lucia," said the Emperor kindly, almost fondly, "you must not allow yourself to be unduly excited;

suppose we are on a false track, the disappointment might almost kill you."

"The suspense will," she replied.

"All I know is this," said the Emperor, "the young gladiator who was compelled (against his will, doubtless,) to fight with the cestus, strongly resembled my young deliverer,—your boy; and I even sent for him, that I might see him again, but they said he was too ill."

"Too ill! then I will fly to his side."

"You must not, my Lucia; think of the scandal, the sensation such a thing would cause; nay, wait but till the morrow, I will seek him myself; I owe him a life, and will repay it."

"But was he not very ill, perhaps dying?"

"Nay, only exhausted by the fight, he did not receive any severe blow; again, you must be prepared for disappointment, it may not be your child."

But how can I wait, and how changed may I find him; to what depths of vice and sin may not the intimacy with these cruel men have reduced him, and is he not even now a murderer in the eyes of God?"

A low cry as of one in exquisite mental pain interrupted them.

They listened intently, it was not repeated.

"It must have been in an adjoining room," said Helena.

"It was but the night wind," said Lucilianus, "listen how it howls around the villa, a storm is rising; but if not the *wind*, perhaps it was a *warning!* remember the letters."

"What letters?" said Helena.

"Oh nothing of any importance," replied Constantine, "we have deeper matters before us; Lucia, friend of my boyhood, trust to me, I will do all in my power; with the early morn I will ride over to the house of the lanista, and will see the young combatant; I shall know him again if he is Eachan."

Contented, or rather forced to appear so, Lucia left the room with the Empress, and Lucilianus was left alone again with Constantine.

"You should not have frightened the ladies about those letters, Lucilianus."

"I crave pardon, my lord; I have your permission to act upon them, so far as to set a watch?"

"Yes, certainly, if it satisfies you; for me I shall rest, I must be up betimes."

And dismissing Lucilianus, the Emperor prepared for slumber.

It was no imagination, the low cry had indeed been uttered by the unhappy Evanus in his concealment.

He knew all now, he had heard his mother's voice, she was yet alive, but the discovery was attended with circumstances of such exquisite pain, that he could not repress the cry, although he had trembled from head to foot afterwards, lest it should betray the existence of the *son* in the would-be assassin.

Yes, she was alive, and he dared not reveal himself, lest the shock should kill her, and perhaps kill him too, as he thought in the extremity of his mental anguish.

It was over now, the hideous spell under which he had been holden; vengeance had given place to remorse; the desire of shedding blood, to the desire of finding some place for repentance.

He would have given worlds, could he but have suffered annihilation; he felt the fearful degradation of his position so acutely that his worst foes, had he any, might pity him.

Was it for this that he had shut his ears to the sweet whisperings which had recalled his mother's words from time to time; had there not been hours when the very birds seemed to sing of Christian peace and joy,—of peace on earth and goodwill towards men, and he had chosen instead to open his ears to the whispering of fiends, when they suggested visions of bloodshed and strife?

The tears,—tears of repentance,—really coursed down his cheeks now, and with difficulty did he restrain his sobs; in fact he did not wholly restrain them, for Constantine turned uneasily in his bed, as if he were listening,—nay raising himself to listen,—for the subdued noises startled him.

But at last, the loud regular breathing assured Evanus that the Emperor slept, and he hesitated no longer; softly he put aside the curtains which veiled the recess wherein he had been concealed, softly his naked feet trod the richly carpeted floor, yet more carefully did he open the heavily ornamented door, the joints of which had been carefully oiled by the treacherous butler; he closed it again, and stood in the peristylium, which was lighted ever and anon by bright moonlight, as the clouds swiftly chased each other over the stormy sky. It was blowing a gale without, but the noise was all in his favour; he gained the passage leading to the atrium, and sought the outer door, which the butler had promised should be open.

His intention was to fly anywhere, he knew not where, anywhere where Lutatius could not find him; but all the future was an unexplored land, a terra incognita; there would be time to think by and bye,—at present a cold sweat chilled him to the bone, and he could only escape—escape.

He knew that at that moment Pompeianus waited him without, in company with Lutatius, that they had their horses on the river bank, beneath the cliff, and his intention was to escape in the diametrically opposite direction.

Already the open door was before him, when he beheld a sight, which arrested his steps.

Lutatius was slowly and cautiously approaching, ascending the gravel path, towards the open door.

The youth stood transfixed with horror; his fate seemed to force itself upon him; he *must* be a murderer then or die; well, he would die.

Suddenly two other figures appeared, treading with muffled feet behind Lutatius, as if pursuing him, while he did not hear them.

The lanista reached the door, and stood vainly seeking to penetrate the inner gloom; the figures without drew nearer,—were they of flesh and blood? Just then the low tread reached the ears of Lutatius, he turned, and at the same moment the guards without drew their swords and bid him surrender.

"What, betrayed!" he cried.

"Surrender!" they cried again.

"Never while life endures," he replied, and rushed upon them.

Skilful swordsman though he was, they were almost equally skilful, being old soldiers of Constantius, whom the Empress had retained in her service.

The contest was too unequal, and while Evanus gazed he beheld Lutatius fall, it seemed mortally wounded. A feeling of fidelity to his old master, would have compelled him to assist him in his agony, but Stephanus sprung from behind a pillar, and seized his hand.

"Fool," he said, "follow me, it is all over with him."

He led, or almost dragged, Evanus to the servants' offices, where there was a postern door leading to the gardens; passing rapidly through it, they found a path down the cliff to the ford beneath, and came suddenly upon Pompeianus, with the horses, who had already mounted his own, alarmed by the noise.

"Who comes?" he said.

"Friends," replied Stephanus.

"Where is Lutatius?"

"Dead."

"And the Emperor?"

"I know not, this boy can inform you best; ride on if you would save yourselves, leave me to take care of myself."

The only mode of escape seemed to be with Pompeianus, and Evanus, hardly knowing what he did, mounted and followed him; they rode through the ford at the bend of the river, which was a very practicable one, gained the opposite shore, rode rapidly at a gallop towards the twin hills, then skirting their western base, reached the high road from Durocina to the Via Strata, and for the first time slackened their pace.

"Is Constantine dead,—have you done your work?"

"No," replied Evanus.

"Confusion! then all is lost; how have you failed?"

"I cannot tell you."

Muttering deep curses, Pompeianus rode on with all possible speed, and they scarcely slackened until they reached the Via Strata, about daybreak, where they found a light biga, or two-horse chariot, awaiting them.

They paused but a few moments, took some slight refreshment, and rode on again.

"If Constantine lives," said Pompeianus, "there is no safety for us in Britain; I trust Lutatius is *dead*, not wounded, in the latter case he may have told all."

"I know not," said Evanus.

Pompeianus made most desperate efforts to get some information of a more satisfactory nature, but failed: in fact, it was evident that the mind of poor Evanus was sadly shaken, and that it would require rest to restore its wonted tone; he followed passively, his only desire seemed to be to escape somewhere.

They were rapidly passing through the province south of the Thames known as Britannia Prima,* the most opulent and fertile portion of the island, populated very thickly, and possessing very excellent

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* See *Note Q.*

roads. The pastures were crowded by flocks of sheep and oxen, the parks and woodlands with deer, while they traversed whole districts of arable land covered at that time with the golden corn, awaiting the sickle, or already standing in shocks.

Now and then they passed huge mysterious barrows, which told of the days long gone by, when the Druids ruled the land as they still ruled the Caledonian Highlands; but cromlechs, barrows, circles of stone, already seemed to speak of hoar antiquity, the land of the Atrebatii was no longer known by the name of that ancient British nation.

They reached Bibracte on the Via Strata, before noon, and seeking the chief hospitium, gave their tired horses rest, and slept a few hours; then resuming their journey in the evening with fresh horses, they turned to the south-east, and travelling nearly all night, resting only a short time at a road-side inn, they beheld at early dawn, from the summit of a hill, the great forest known as Anderida Sylva, and beyond it in the far distance the sea glittering like silver in the dawning light.

On the edge of the water they could faintly distinguish the buildings of a fortified city: it was Anderida, the modern Pevensey, then one of the principal ports of Britannia Prima.

Descending the hill, they joined the main road and entered the solemn shades of a mighty forest; grand oaks and beeches rose like the columns in some vast cathedral aisle; the deer abounded in its recesses, and were rigorously preserved; the wolf and bear had been exterminated, or nearly so; they had another lease of our forests, under the Saxons.* So they rode for hours, along the great trunk road from Londinium (or Augusta as it was more commonly called) to Anderida; their route lay under the solemn and grateful shade of the trees, for the sun was again high in the heavens, until suddenly emerging from the forest they beheld the walls of Anderida before them, and the masts of numerous ships rising beyond the walls, crowding the spacious harbour.

The road now ran along the bank of the little river, which here made its exit into the sea; it was lined by numerous villas, the abode of opulent merchants or tradesmen: for the space within the walls was almost wholly occupied by the garrison stationed there.

The walls of the "castra" enclosed an extent of eight acres; six imposing towers rose from the northern wall, and promised to bid defiance to time, so imposing and solid was the masonry; but the principal entrance was from the streets of the city, on the western side, where two large circular towers flanked the gateway.

They left their horses at the posting establishment, and passing through the gateway where the sentinel stood in his niche silent and grim, they traversed

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* *See Note R.*

the fortifications, and found access to the harbour on the southern side, where then existed extensive quays paved with stone, beside which the water was sufficiently deep to permit vessels of large size to lie.

One of these, a richly ornamented galley, a fine specimen of the best naval architecture of those days, impelled by double banks of oars as well as by its sails, lay ready to receive them; the slaves who toiled at the oar were in their places; the sailors were ready to weigh the anchor, and unfurl the sails; the captain stood on his deck to receive the travellers, with great appearance of deference to Pompeianus, who trod the deck with the firm step of one accustomed to command.

Silently the vessel glided down the harbour, reached the open sea, and Pompeianus descended to his cabin, Evanus remaining on the deck, and gazing sadly around him, as if he hardly comprehended his position.

The low coast around Anderida disappeared, the cliffs to the east and west of the bay began to sink, and as the sun declined, its parting beams lingered upon the time-worn summit now known as Beachy Head, until it sank beneath the bosom of the deep.

Night came upon the waters, and night seemed to close upon the soul of our hapless hero also.

BOOK III.

THE CHRISTIANS.

Waft, waft, ye winds, His story,
  And you, ye oceans, roll,
Till like a sea of glory
  It spreads from pole to pole;
Till o'er our conquered nature
  The Lamb for sinners slain,
Redeemer, King, Creator,
  In bliss returns to reign.

CHAPTER I.

THE LAST DAYS OF PAGAN ROME.

THE tenth and last persecution of the Church, by the might of Pagan Rome, was rapidly drawing to its close, and a brief summary of its leading events may not be unwelcome to our readers, while they will enable them to comprehend more easily the situation of the principal actors in our tale.

Diocletian was about forty years of age when he became emperor, owing his exaltation to his merit as a victorious soldier, a man of great sagacity and courage, and to the fact of his having been the avenger of his predecessor, Numerian, whose assassin he had slain with his own hand. Yet he was born a slave, the son of servile parents, in the house of a Roman senator, and he took his name simply from Doclia, a small town in Dalmatia from which his mother derived her origin.

The principle of hereditary right had long been abandoned, and the slave of Doclia became the ruler of imperial Rome.

But feeling the weight of empire too great for him to discharge its duties with fidelity, he chose Maximian, a peasant by birth, to be his colleague, a man insensible to pity, and the ready instrument of every politic act of cruelty, so that when a bloody sacrifice seemed necessary Maximian appeared as the acting authority, and when enough blood had been shed Diocletian appeared to temper severity with mercy, and gain popularity at the expense of his colleague, who ever submitted to the influence of his benefactor as to that of a superior genius.

But not only was the empire thus divided, a subdivision also took place. Constantius, with the title of Cæsar, was intrusted with the government of Spain, Gaul, and Britain; the Illyrian provinces to Galerius; while Italy and Africa were considered the especial care of Maximian; Thrace, Egypt, and the rich provinces of Asia, of Diocletian.

Diocletian and Constantius were alike averse to the policy of persecution, but Maximian and Galerius hated the Faith of the Crucified with a most bitter and unsparing hatred, and they used all their influence to overcome the reluctance of the others. Representing the Christians as men who, forming a secret society, were attempting to subvert the laws of the empire and to set up a republic in their midst, they overcame the reluctance of Diocletian, who was still the supreme head of affairs, and after the winter which Galerius spent with him in his palace at Nicomedia, on the banks of the Propontis (Sea of Marmora), the twenty-third of February, A.D. 303, was appointed to set bounds to the progress of Christianity, on which day the principal Church of that city was openly destroyed, and on the following day edicts were issued inaugurating the persecution.

Our space would fail to tell of the fearful scenes which followed. Fires which broke out in the imperial palace, and were attributed to the Christians, increased the rage of Diocletian, and caused him to give his whole energy to the work of persecution. Galerius enforced the decrees with the most sanguinary determination; Maximian directed operations in Italy and Africa with similar cruelty; Syria, Palestine, and the east were equally the scenes of Christian constancy and Pagan cruelty; and even in Britain, although Constantius mitigated the rage of the persecutors, yet Alban, our proto-martyr, Aaron, and Julius of Caerleon, with many others, followed their Lord through the Red Sea of blood.

The fearful scenes described by Eusebius,—fearful yet glorious as evidencing the power of the Cross, and the might of divine grace made perfect in weakness, strong in tribulation,—fully assure us that no refinement of cruelty was too great for the persecutors, who contended as though prizes were offered to the most ingenious in cruelty.

It is computed by some authors that twenty thousand martyrs must have suffered in this last and fiery persecution, which did not entirely cease until the empire was re-united under the sole rule of Constantine, in the year A.D. 324, after the defeat and death of Licinius, the last persecutor.

In the year following the issue of the first edicts, Diocletian and Maximian astonished the world by retiring from the throne, and leaving the administration of the empire to Galerius and Constantius, who were now called by the title Augustus, and to two Cæsars chosen by Galerius, who, passing over the sons of Maximian and Constantius,—Maxentius and Constantine,—appointed Licinius to rule in the East, Severus in Italy and Africa.

But, as we have already seen, the legions of the west proclaimed Constantine the successor of his father, and meanwhile, Maxentius—who, like his father, the retired Emperor Maximian, was greatly enraged at the appointment of Severus—conspired secretly against his rule, and even his life. Our tale will unfold the sequel.

The sun was sinking in the blue waves of the Mediterranean, when a chariot containing two persons, attended by outriders, was speeding rapidly to the gates of Rome, along the well-known Flaminian way. They had arrived at an eminence, which gave them a full view of the city, and they had, as if by one common impulse, checked their steeds to gaze upon the glorious sight. Mighty

Rome lay before them, enthroned on her seven hills, her gorgeous temples, her monuments and triumphal arches, her palaces and columns, stretching as far as the eye could reach in unbroken splendour, and gilded by the departing rays. Never was such a sight seen elsewhere, never was the might of the ancient city more awfully impressed on the senses, than on the first view from the distant eminences, and Pompeianus, accustomed as he was to the sight, involuntarily paused, while his younger companion, revived from the lethargy into which he had sunk, gazed with undissembled emotion.

It was indeed Pompeianus and Evanus, who had permitted himself to be brought to Italy by his employer, who, for reasons of his own, to be presently explained, had taken the greatest care to secure the companion of his flight.

While they yet gazed at the gorgeous scene, and the sunlight yet lingered on the Capitol, rich in historical associations, a bright light arose behind it, bringing every detail of its temples into dark prominence, and soon a pyramid of flame appeared to rise behind the famous hill.

The travellers gazed in astonishment, but the face of Pompeianus gradually assumed composure, and something very like a smile sat on his lips.

"Maxentius is beforehand with me," he muttered; "he scarely needs my assistance now."

"What is it?" asked Evanus.

"Oh, only a conflagration, and perhaps a little bloodshed; it is not an uncommon circumstance in Rome. Drive on faster," he cried to the charioteer, and the carriage sped down the hill.

Arrived at the gate of the city, they found the gate closed, but it was speedily opened so soon as Pompeianus was recognized, and they entered the city. The citizens were evidently under the influence of great excitement; some of them were standing in groups eagerly conversing, others running in hot haste towards the scene of devastation; the streets were so crowded that, relinquishing the chariot to the slaves who attended him, Pompeianus, bidding Evanus keep close to his side, dismounted, and they continued the journey to their destination on foot.

They passed along gorgeous and brilliantly-lighted streets lined with arcades, under the shade of lofty and imposing palaces, until Evanus became literally bewildered with the glare and the magnificence; everywhere around him were the signs of untold wealth; at every turn the eye caught column or arch, testifying to some ancient victory of the Roman people; the shops were fast closing, but many, yet open, exhibited such magnificence in the objects of art or of luxury within, that Evanus could hardly refrain from the thought once expressed by Caractacus,—"How is it possible that a people possessed of such magnifience at home should envy our humble habitations in Britain?"

They entered the forum, the great centre of Roman life and business, situated in a hollow between the Capitoline and Palatine hills. Magnificent temples rose around, and their lofty summits reddened in the light of the distant conflagration, which was hidden from the view of the travellers as they walked below, the statues on the summit of the Ædes Concordiæ, the Temple of Concord, strangely enough, being most conspicuous in the light, while on the Capitoline hill above, the gorgeous front of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, with its triple doors, appeared grandly imposing. They advanced up the Clivus Capitolinus, till, reaching the terrace on its summit, they beheld the cause of all this excitement.

On the Palatine hill a spacious palace was in flames, and in the ruddy light armed multitudes might be seen rushing madly to and fro, some charging fiercely into the ranks opposed to them, uttering loud shouts of triumph, while others raised cries of terror and alarm.

"Is it an enemy?" asked Evanus, simply.

"Yes, the enemies of the future Imperator, Maxentius, are perishing in those flames, or beneath the darts of the indignant citizens, who refuse any longer to groan beneath the exactions of Galerius. But we must haste to salute the new Augustus."

Remote from the fire, on the opposite slope of the Palatine, amidst the gorgeous gardens and terraces laid out by Nero when he claimed the whole hill as his own, rose a modest but exquisitely built palace. Its beautiful portico arrested the gaze immediately; the imposing pillars which supported the overhanging roof were of African marble, and statues worthy of Phidias stood between them.

Here Pompeianus paused, for a multitude of citizens and clients of the illustrious lord of the mansion, in every state of excitement, and, if the truth must be told, of *intoxication*, blocked up the road, brandishing weapons in the air, and shouting "Long life to Maxentius—Imperator!"

Suddenly there was silence, as Maxentius himself, supported by his tried friends, stood upon the terrace beneath the portico.

He was of somewhat short stature, and his face might, like that of Sylla, be compared to "a mulberry sprinkled with meal." At the present moment, his staggering attitude, his broken speech, his flushed face, all bore testimony that he had sought courage for the trials of the night in the wine-cup.

"Long live the Emperor," shouted the mob.

"Conscript Fathers,—no, fellow citizens, I mean," stammered Maxentius, "the voice of the people is the voice of the gods, therefore with great joy,—I mean great reluctance,— (hiccup) I accept the honour which you confer this night upon me; I (hiccup)—"

But here he could proceed no longer, for he was most evidently very intoxicated, and an orator who stood by his side strove to excuse the shortcomings of his lord, as he said,—

"The Augustus has grieved so deeply over the blood which has been unhappily, though necessarily shed, that he is hardly fit to address his people; in his name, I only add that his sentiments are just what those of an emperor should be, and that is all you care to know."

"Long live the noble Gallus; he speaks like Cicero."

"The Augustus desires me to give notice that the first acts of his reign will be acts of gratitude to his fellow citizens. There will be a distribution of corn, a modius to each citizen; of money, an aureus to each; the public fountains will flow with wine for three days; and on the third day there will be grand games given at the Colosseum, at the Emperor's expense, and according to the good old practise of our ancestors, 'sine missione.'"

The good people were enraptured, and a number raised the cry, "Christianos ad leones."

"By all means," said Gallus; "Maxentius is devoted to the gods; let the impious perish; we have food for the lions, and a woman for the wild cow and net."

Once again the multitude, which by this time filled all the avenues, shouted till the hills echoed back the cry, and when Maxentius had retired, the mob returned to complete the night, which had thus begun with blood, in revels and debauchery.

Alas! they were rapidly ripening for the sword of the Goths and Huns. Civilization, without Christianity, had led, as it always must, to the most fearful degeneracy in the natural character. Where were now the representatives of Fabricius or Regulus, or even of Cæsar and Cicero? Well were the words of Horace fulfilled,

* Damnosa quid non imminuit dies
Ætas parentum pejor avis tulit
Nos inferiores, mox daturos
Progeniem vitiosiorem.

But to return to our story.

When the people began to depart, and it was possible to approach the entrance to the palace, Pompeianus seized the hand of Evanus, and forced his way to the steps leading to the portico; gaining the doorway, he was instantly recognised by the porters and at once admitted. Still leading Evanus, they passed through passages and halls of such magnitude, and such wondrous magnificence, that

* What does not wasting time destroy,
More vicious than their fathers were,
Our sires begat us baser still,
About to bring forth children, who
Shall be more vicious than ourselves.

Evanus was bewildered. Hangings of the richest silk screened every wall; objects of exquisite art met the eye; the woodwork of tables, couches, or the like, was inlaid with gold and jewels; there were fountains in which gold and silver fish sported; while the most delicious aquatic plants breathed forth sweet odours; invisible perfumed waters occasionally greeted the heated brow; the most luxurious couches invited to rest; the painted pavement seemed instinct with life; sweet music undulated softly from unseen minstrels through the passages. It was like a glimpse of fairy land. *Now* passages seemed to lead to country scenes lighted by the full moon, and it was not till further inspection that the eye perceived that the lovely sylvan views were but painted by the skill of the artist; lights, hanging amidst lustres and reflected from metallic mirrors, filled the passages with the most lovely radiance.

They met many richly dressed visitors, or members of the household, in snowy tunics with golden bands; but the noise and disturbance without seemed utterly banished here, and it was as the abode of peace and love. Yes, such peace as Sodom possessed when the mysterious Three visited Abraham, such polluting love as that of the fabled vampire.

Leaving Evanus upon a couch in a large and brilliant ante-room, amidst many other visitors, and, although the boy knew it not, under the guardianship of an upper domestic, Pompeianus sought the Emperor.

After some delay, he was admitted by the chamberlain into the immediate presence of the now mighty Maxentius. Gallus bowed as Pompeianus entered, and silently left the apartment.

"Thou hast returned then," said Maxentius, after receiving the homage of his envoy, whose salutation, however, seemed purely formal, and lacked all undue affectation of servility. "Let me see, you have been to Britain since we last met?"

"Domine, you are aware of the fact."

"Oh, yes, I remember, I particularly charged you to taste the oysters of Rutupiæ; not a single oyster worth eating has made its appearance in Italy this season."

"It was not to taste oysters you sent me into Britain."

"Oh, I had forgotten," said Maxentius, still only half sober; "it was, perhaps, to collect nightingale's tongues; they abound in the British woods."

"Domine, we are alone."

Maxentius looked timidly round.

"Are you assured of that?" he said; "the very walls have ears; look behind the hangings."

Pompeianus calmly obeyed; the silken curtains fell back into their places.

Then, for the first time, Maxentius tried in vain to frame the question which he dreaded to ask ; at last he stammered out,—

"I trust you left Constantine in good health?"

"Domine, your divinity will be grieved to hear that such is the case."

Maxentius changed colour.

"What, Pompeianus, I never knew you fail before, when love or hatred was concerned!"

"True, Domine; and I had a small account of my own against this new Augustulus of the West."

"True, *Augustulus* indeed; but how did you fail?"

"I employed a young gladiator, who had just earned his freedom by bravery in the circus; for some reason or other, although he actually gained access to the bed-chamber of Constantine, he failed to strike the blow."

"And where is he?"

"I have brought him with me."

"Have you any other living witness?"

"None."

"Thank the gods; this *one* must be removed. My imperial father has persuaded me that it was a mistake to fear Constantine; like me, he has been neglected by Galerius; like me, he has injuries to revenge; we are both Augusti against the wishes of the potentates of the Eastern world; we must form alliances."

"I trust, Domine, you do not order me to love Constantine; he is the enemy of the gods."

"Tush, the only gods worth serving are gold, love, and wine, and, as Emperor, I mean to offer these deities acceptable worship; still, you may do as you please, hate or love him, as you like."

"Then what shall we do with the boy?"

"He must be removed. Can you guard him for a few days?"

"Yes, Domine."

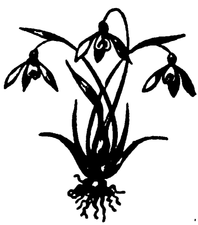
"You said he was a young gladiator; there are games in the Colosseum on the third day; he may die then, and gratify the good people while he relieves us from further anxiety; the games are 'sine missione.'"

"He is a skilful fellow with the cestus."

"But not, perhaps, with the foils; we must try Lysander, my favourite Greek, he will finish him neatly; and meanwhile, my Pompeianus, be silent as the tomb; you are sure you employed no other agents?"

"Only Lutatius, a lanista, and I have since learned that he died on the spot of a mortal wound received in the attempt to enter the villa in question, without, as I imagine, having time or inclination to utter one word."

"It is well; so, my Pompeianus, we may enjoy ourselves. Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. A banquet awaits us in the great triclinium, with such wine, such delicacies; it has cost nearly ten thousand sestertia, but the treasures of imperial Rome are ours; let us join our friends."



CHAPTER II.

The Colosseum.

THE mighty amphitheatre known as the Colosseum was commenced by Vespasian, completed by Domitian, and was capable of containing nearly 100,000 spectators. It derived its name from a colossal statue of Nero, to whom it might well have been dedicated. Its marvellous ruins, the most impressive, perhaps, in the world, remain to astonish the wayfarer. Well might Martial exclaim, "Let Memphis cease to boast of its pyramids, Babylon of its marvels; all are as nothing compared to the amphitheatre of the Cæsars." The travellers may yet gaze at the chambers once devoted to the gladiators, the cells of the criminals, the dens of the lions, and stand where it is recorded that one hundred of these ravenous beasts were let loose at once, that an emperor might transfix them with his arrows; he may recal, as in a dream, the hour when the martyrs stood calmly awaiting the spring of the tiger, or the ferocious hug of the bear. But what must have been the reality, when 100,000 excited eyes gazed upon the scenes of blood and slaughter enacted beneath, while hundreds of beasts, or even thousands of gladiators, fought to the death.

But the blood of the martyrs consecrated the pile, and saved it from destruction. When mediæval barbarism used it as a stone quarry, the Pope of the day solemnly consecrated it to the memory of these first witnesses of Christ, and no other stone was removed. So may it ever exist, the noblest monument to those who, through their heroic self-devotion, bestowed upon the world a higher and better civilization.

On the third day after the arrival of Evanus at Rome, the Colosseum was crowded to its utmost capacity. Maxentius presided in person, and Pompeianus, whom Evanus now knew as the Prætorian prefect, stood at his right hand.

There is little need to repeat the bloody scenes so often described, to tell how upwards of a thousand men, ranged in ranks, fought until the conquered side was exterminated,—how the wounded received no mercy, and the populace became maddened with blood,—or, to tell how the arena was afterwards arranged to represent a sylvan scene in an African oasis,—how four unhappy criminals doomed to the lions were made to recline under the shade of trees upon a grassy bank, and the cages of the lions were so opened, that the possible scenes of the desert were enacted to the life, and the people shouted for joy at what they considered a touching spectacle from nature.

But still, single combats had an immense attraction for the people, and when it was announced that a young Caledonian, who had acquired renown in Britain, would contend with Lysander, the well-known Greek, the master of the foil, a fresh glow of excitement pervaded the assemblage, and bets were as usual freely interchanged.

They stood upon the arena, clothed in closely fitting white tunics, the Greek supple, beardless, and youthful, evidently the master of the situation; the yet younger Celt calm and self-possessed, as though life or death were indifferent to him.

And yet such was not altogether the case; it was against his own will that he appeared on the arena, but it was the *Emperor's* will, and he could only escape by death. Although the remembrance of his mother's words made the life of a gladiator odious to him, his feelings on the point were not sufficiently developed to cause him to sacrifice life rather than comply.

He longed to know more of his mother's Faith, but he knew he was not yet a Christian, and waited till he could find the means of learning more of the mysterious creed, which he felt could give him peace; if he yet clung to life, it was because he did not wish to die until he could find some way of removing the past from his mind, and perhaps seeking forgiveness from the dear surviving parent whom he could never forget.

At first, when Pompeianus announced to him the Emperor's will, he felt disposed to refuse to fight and to take the consequences, but, in the absence of higher principles, the love of life prevailed. Let not the reader misjudge him.

And now he stood opposed to Lysander.

They fought, at first warily, but Evanus immediately perceived that he was over-matched; the few lessons he had received in Britain, and lately in Rome, had only made him the easier prey for the Greek, who, on his part, sure of his victim, trifled with the unhappy youth, and inflicting some slight wounds, carefully delayed the final thrust.

One mode of escape suggested itself to the young Caledonian, and he felt it was the only one, for his adversary's sword enclosed its owner as in a wall of steel, and left no opening whereby he might be wounded, while the death of his young opponent appeared to all simply a question of time, and many wondered at the unequal match, not knowing that the Emperor had designed it.

It was a desperate mode of escape, but it was the only one, and Evanus put it in operation.

Suddenly extending his left hand with the palm open, as his adversary made a thrust, he managed to receive the thin blade through his open palm; the agony was intense, but he was able to close his fingers so as to prevent the withdrawal of the blade, and, before the astonished Greek could disengage the weapon, Evanus, maddened by the pain, thrust his own keen blade through the heart of his adversary, then disengaged his hand, and the Greek fell back dead upon the arena.

One universal shout rent the air; the daring act excited the fervent admiration of the multitude, and Evanus became the favourite of the hour.

He was taken back to the chambers of the gladiators, beneath the range of seats, amidst deafening applause, and the body of his adversary, attached by a hook and rope to an ass, received the usual indignities, those who had betted upon him being very angry.

The games proceeded, but a very thrilling scene was reserved for their close.

A young lady of patrician birth had been convicted of the crime of Christianity; her own parents had given her up to the law, and although only nineteen, she was fated to die by a death of lingering agony.

They brought her in, clad in virgin attire, and she stood in the presence of the vast multitude, her eyes timidly cast down, but, strange to say, no tremor visible in her frame.

There was a great sensation, and, in solemn silence, the Emperor proffered her pardon, if she would but renounce the impious faith of the Christians, as he profanely styled it.

"My lord," she said, "I have come hither to die;

tempt me not to forsake my heavenly bridegroom, for He has loved me with an—"

Her last words were literally drowned in curses and execrations,—"the atheist,—the devourer of little babes,—the cursed worshipper of an ass,—ah, ah, ah; burn her,—let a lion loose,—the tiger,—lower her into seething pitch,—ah, ah!"

She stood unmoved; doubtless she saw, like Stephen, one who stood at God's right hand, and her clasped hands and moving lips spoke of prayer, and suggested the thought of angelic guardianship.

The tormentors approached; they brought with them a large net and strong iron pegs; throwing their victim to the ground, which she kissed in submission, they enclosed her with the net, and firmly secured it.

A moment's pause, and they retired.

Mad with rage, a wild cow rushed from an open door into the arena, bellowing with fury, and from a safe elevation, the tormentors showered little darts, with inflammable material previously kindled attached to them, and the wretched beast, maddened with pain, sought an object for its fury, and found it in the martyr.

Why should I tell, all is past, how this way and that way it gored her,
Tearing her flesh from the bones, for the net protracted her torments?
Scarcely one word could the scribes of the Church catch, only, they fancied,

One brief prayer for herself, and one, so it seemed, for the tyrants.*

But at last the fierce beast turned away, and left her quivering in the death agony, and the multitude called out impatiently for the end to be put to her sufferings.

The cow was driven away, and a gladiator was sent for.

Suddenly there was a pause; the Emperor had spoken; the herald repeated his words in the dead silence.

"Let them send in the young Caledonian."

Silence again, until the doorway leading to the gladiators' chambers opened, and Evanus, pale from loss of blood, his left arm in a sling, was seen advancing to the centre of the arena; he paused, and his colour changed, as he saw the struggling bloody heap before him.

"Caledonian," cried the herald, "it is your part to strike the finishing blow, and to dismiss the spirit of the atheist to the shades."

What caused the wondrous light which seemed to shine upon the face of Evanus? Was it a reflection from the unseen angels who hovered around the half-finished sacrifice?

"Strike," shouted the herald.

"I cannot," replied Evanus.

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* Dr. Neale. Original Sequences and Hymns.

"The Emperor bids thee."

"My lord, I cannot slay a defenceless woman."

"Art thou, then, a Christian?"

"Alas! no."

"Wilt thou obey?"

"I cannot."

His fate would have been sealed that instant, but for the popularity he had gained by his previous valour; it saved him for the moment; the people shouted,—"The Caledonians never strike women," —"another gladiator,"—"send another,"—"send a Roman,"—"not a Christian, he looks like one," —"hujus facio,"—"the Christians are never gladiators."

Meanwhile Maxentius whispered to Pompeianus who stood by his side; the latter wrote on his tablets, and gave the missive to a tabellarius, who left the presence.

And now another gladiator advanced, but his office was needless,—the angels had borne the soul of the released sufferer to Paradise.

The sports were over; the people poured through the vomitoria, comparing their notes; betters made up their books, and counted their gains and losses; the common topic of conversation was the young Caledonian.

"A soft-hearted fellow, but very brave."

"They say those savages are slaves to their women."

"What did he say when asked whether he was a Christian?"

"No."

"I thought it was 'alas, no.'"

"I only heard the word 'no.'"

Amongst the crowd, Evanus, still bearing his wounded hand in a sling, left the amphitheatre, and made his way along the street known as the Via Sacra.

Suddenly a hand touched him on the shoulder.

CHAPTER III.

The Followers of the Lord.

THE Via Sacra was crowded to excess; the multitudes, who were returning from the Colosseum, encountered those multitudes who had been maddening themselves with the wine which flowed in the public fountains. Bands of men and women, scarcely sober enough to preserve the decencies of dress, with ivy bound around their brows, danced like maniacs through the streets. Others stooped down to drink from the gutters, which flowed here and there with wine, diluted with mud, and sometimes even with blood, which marked the scene of some recent affray.

Glaring lights flashed from every temple, palace, and villa, for the Emperor had ordered a general illumination on this third day of his reign.

All the wine shops were open for those who preferred more refined liquor than that of the Emperor, and through the open doors, scenes of yet more shameless vice might be discerned.

Bacchus and Venus were the deities invoked that night, sparingly Ceres, sparingly in comparison, and the orgies of blood were yielding to those of lust and drunkenness.

"Alas, their vine is the vine of Sodom, and their grapes, the grapes of Gomorrha."

"Did you touch my shoulder?" enquired Evanus of the speaker, who was muffled in a cloak.

"Can you trust a Christian?"

"You trust me when you proclaim yourself one."

"Let trust beget trust; your life is in danger."

"From whom?"

"From the Emperor."

"The Emperor? convince me that you speak the truth."

"You are the possessor of a deadly secret; remember the villa of Helena."

"By the gods!"

"Swear not by demons, but follow me; pause one moment, and look in the shadow of that arch, which commemorates the judgment of God upon Jerusalem, in the midst of yet more guilty Rome; what dost thou see?"

"Nothing. Oh yes, a dark figure crouches in the shadow of the arch."

"Beware of dark figures; he has dogged thy steps from the Colosseum; wait here for one moment, and thou shalt elude the spy."

A noisy multitude descended from the arch of Titus, which crowned the summit of the Velian hill, where the Via Sacra crossed it, and filled up the whole street, blowing horns, gesticulating, crying sometimes, "Christianos ad leones," sometimes, "Vivat Maxentius," and bearing amongst them an effigy of the fallen emperor Severus, which they mercilessly hacked, in the absence of the living man, with daggers and knives.

"Follow," said the stranger; and while the crowd hid them from the observation of the figure beneath the arch, they descended an alley to the right, passed through the foliage of a deserted garden, surrounding a mansion recently destroyed by fire, and rejoined the Via Sacra beyond the arch upon the slope of the Sacer Clivus, passed under the shade of the Temple of Vesta, by the Tullianum, under the arch of Severus, up the Clivus Capitolinus.

From the summit of that elevation they gazed for a brief moment upon the city.

It was almost as light as day: so general was the illumination, that palace and temple, column and arch, seemed to glow with radiance, and the Tiber shone like a stream fretted with gold as it reflected the vivid light.

The Palatine, with its gorgeous imperial palace, and the scarcely less gorgeous abode of Vaccus, not yet levelled with the ground, arrested the gaze on the left, and further behind them the Velian Hill, with the Arch of Titus, where the spy had lurked; on the other hand, the Quirinal, with its gorgeous temple, raised its imposing front, but the

Forum was the spot which arrested their attention; it was crowded with a half-drunken multitude, singing lewd songs, quarrelling, fighting, still stooping to drink at the gutters, which yet flowed with wine, gazing upon the performances of mountebanks, listening to poets and singers; but alas, almost all they said or did seemed unfit for a Christian even to hear or see.

Beyond, the illumination took a deeper colour, for blood-red flames, kindled in riot or in drunkenness, shot up into the air, as if some huge wine-shop had fallen a prey to the flames.

Intensely as his feelings were excited, the scene upon which he gazed was one never forgotten by Evanus, yet he felt a loathing he could not express for the besotted and bloodthirsty multitude, and yearned for solitude and silence that he might think, —only think; he could not analyse his own feelings, or understand his present condition; he was hardly himself.

"How did you know me?" he said; "how could you know what happened so far away?"

"My son, a word will explain. I reached Rome but yesterday from Britain, from Durocina; I know the Empress Helena and her household well."

Evanus sighed aloud; he dared not ask one question; he could hardly speak; and the stranger comprehended his emotion, and felt it was not the time for further explanation.

In silence they descended the hill on the opposite side, by the flight of the hundred steps, and continued their course along a road bordered with isolated villas, until the stranger paused before the portico of a modest and retired habitation, and knocked lightly at the door. The porter opened, the stranger made the sign of the cross rapidly, and was at once admitted. Crossing the atrium, which was entirely undecorated by images or statues, they entered a small study at the opposite extremity.

An aged man was seated at a table, upon which was a manuscript of the Gospel of S. John, such as Evanus well remembered having seen in his mother's hands.

The face of the occupant was exceedingly prepossessing; his venerable white beard and scanty locks inspired respect, and adorned a countenance which seemed to glow with love.

"Welcome, good Agathus.* Spared another day. Thou hast brought a young brother!"

"His life is in danger; he needs shelter."

"The desolate and afflicted are ever welcomed; is he of the Faithful?"

Évanus shook his head sadly, and Agathus stooping, recounted, in a low voice, as it seemed to Evanus, the scene in the amphitheatre, for more

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* See *Note S.*

than once he saw tears roll down the aged cheeks of the listener.

"Where didst thou learn mercy, my child?" he said at last, "surely not in the schools of the gladiators?"

"Alas! no, my Father, at my mother's knee."

"Thy mother! is she, then, a Christian?"

"She is."

"And thou, my son?"

"Alas! I am unworthy to be her child; she was so good, so like the Lord Christ of Whom she loved to tell me, and I—and I—"

"Come here, my child, stand beside me," said the aged Bishop, for such he was, as he laid his hand lovingly upon the shoulder of the sobbing youth; "pour thy tale of sorrows into my ears; thy mother's prayers plead for thee before the throne of grace."

Agathus left the chamber, and Evanus remained alone with the Bishop.

One hour had passed, when the tramp of armed men resounded without; then heavy knocks at the door startled the inmates, and Agathus entered the study once more.

"My Father, no time must be lost; the villa is surrounded; they have dogged our steps."

"They seek me," said Evanus; "let me go forth, I will not endanger others."

"Poor boy, I were rather a wolf than a shepherd could I thus surrender thee; fear not, there is safety for us all; follow without dread."

Leaving the chamber, and passing through a small peristylium, they descended a flight of steps to a vault, originally perhaps, a wine cellar; a trap-door, cunningly concealed so as to escape observation, was raised by Agathus, and disclosed a flight of steps up which a blast of cold wind rushed.

Descending hastily, just as the crash of the falling door reached their ears, and replacing the trap-door, they gained a large dark passage below, which they traversed in the direction of a faint light at its extremity.

They reached it, and pushing aside some heavy curtains, stood in a chamber of large dimensions, such as Evanus had never seen before.*

A solitary lamp burnt over a raised platform at the end of the subterranean church, for such it was, an arched recess in the wall contained an arcosolium, or altar tomb, covered with a snow white cloth, and bearing on its front the words "*Sextus in pace*," with the palm branch and crown; a cross was sculptured behind a small chest (or tabernacle) which rested upon the altar.

In the centre of the area, where the passages crossed, was a bier, and upon it reposed some object, covered by a richly embroidered pall.

See *Note T.*

Evanus drew near and gazed; he knew that calm and lovely face, upon which was no lingering trace of the death agony,—so calm in its everlasting repose, as if the joy of the immortal spirit had left its reflex upon the mortal clay.

A few figures attracted his attention kneeling here and there, and like them he knelt and strove to pray.

And as he prayed, a feeling of peace came over him, such as he had not felt for many weary months, and the tears over which the angels rejoiced coursed down his cheeks.

Meanwhile sweet sounds arose, they seemed to him of angels' voices, such angels as his mother had told him of.

* Cease, ye tearful mourners,
Thus your hearts to rend;
Death is life's beginning
Rather than its end.

What though to corruption
We this body give?
Soon shall all its senses
Re-awake and live.

Soon shall life revisit
These poor bones again,
And the blood be flowing
Through each tingling vein.

And from its corruption
This same body soar,
With the self-same spirit
That was here of yore.

* *From Prudentius.*

Here Eternal Wisdom
  Lately made its home,
And again shall claim it
  In the days to come.

Then shall hope in glory
  Its fruition see;
Then shall life be lost
  In immortality.

O Eternal Justice,
  Make no more delay;
O Divinest Period,
  Speed thou on thy way.

The solemn hour, the touching tale of love strong as death told by the figure on the bier, the end of distress and sadness, the sure and certain hope of calm, passionless joy, shot a positive thrill of hope and love through the heart of the penitent Evanus. Earth,—its stormy passions, its cruelties, its emotions of rage or lust, its oppressors and tyrants,—seemed banished in the presence of that love and self-devotion which found death for Christ the gate to everlasting life, that life where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.

Ah, who shall tell the strength of a holy mother's prayers, or of the influence of her life, upon the hearts of her children? All the fond recollections of early childhood seemed now identified with the holiest emotions of religion; the intense love of the ardent boy for the mother of whom he felt himself so unworthy, became the very means whereby her loving prayers were fulfilled, the attraction which drew the son, as it had once drawn her, within the grasp of a Saviour's love.

Stained as his hands were, although involuntarily, with blood, fierce as were the storms of passion which had swept over his soul, he had found the fountain which could cleanse from iniquity, he had heard the voice which could say to the surging waves, "Peace, be still."

CHAPTER IV.

The Wandering Sheep.

It was Whitsun Eve, A.D. 307.

Amidst the lovely sylvan scenes of the upper Apennines existed at that day a small village, afar from the high road, and surrounded by forests, beyond which the peaks of the upper mountains pierced the sky.

It was a retreat in which a few happy Christians had found a refuge from the heat of persecution, and it had been recently placed by the Bishop Marcellus under the care of the priest Agathus.

It was a happy day for Evanus; his time of probation was over; he had long been enrolled amongst the Catechumens, and was now about to receive the fulfilment of his earnest desires, for he was this evening to pass beneath the regenerating waters of Baptism. Happy indeed had been the period since we last parted with him; it is true that there had been fluctuations of feeling; hours of remorse so deep that he had almost doubted of pardon; and times when he felt as if he could not know happiness until re-united with his mother. But yet his wise and kind director bid him wait, and in His own time God would remove the causes which would have surrounded his return to Britain with danger, and then he would return with him in person; and he felt that it was only as a Christian, forgiven both by God and man,—if he could gain the forgiveness of Constantine,—that he could see her again with joy.

For the jealous Maxentius had searched Rome in vain for the young gladiator, and the police of the empire, more skilful and vigilant perhaps than any similar body known in history, would have made a journey across the frontiers of Italy very perilous.

The brethren in Britain had been written to, that through them the events succeeding the attempted assassination might be disclosed; they replied that a strict search was being made everywhere for the young gladiator, but that they knew not its object, nor whether his parentage was known.

So Evanus was bidden to wait, and, reconciled to his God, to trust Him in Whose Fatherly hand are all the events of our lives.

Words fail to describe his happiness this evening; he could truly say that his soul panted as the hart for the waterbrooks,—for the seal of adoption in the living family of God, the Church which is His body.

The trees as they rustled in the breeze, the sweet murmur of the rivulets descending from the mountains, the songs the birds sang, all seemed insensibly to remind him of the days of boyish innocence in similar scenes, and of that far more happy state to which he was about to be admitted.

He descended towards the village; its church stood upon the banks of the stream, and already the congregation were filling its hallowed courts. Agathus was waiting for him; he joined the band of neophytes, and entered the sacred building.

It would be but the repetition of an oft-described scene, to tell how the candidates descended into the baptismal flood, how afterwards emerging they were clad in white, how the rite of Confirmation was solemnly administered, and they were initiated into the knowledge of the Holy Mysteries—the Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, a knowledge, from prudential motives, jealously guarded from mere catechumens, lest the heathen should gain the knowledge, and seek occasion to profane so great a Mystery.

He had been baptized by the name Evanus, a name they said prophetically given him, since it signified "the grace of God."

There are seasons in one's life never to be forgotten, and this Whitsuntide was one to Evanus.

It passed away; that period of calm and joy, that feast which speaks to the very heart of that Blessed Spirit who is

> "Sweetest shelter from the heat,
> Comfort in adversity."

The south wind had blown upon the garden of the

Beloved, the souls for which He had given His blood; the north wind was about to pour its icy blasts upon them and they knew it not.

But it came like a thunder clap.

It was Sunday morn; the Eucharistic Sacrifice had been offered, the Communion, to many their last, received, when a band of soldiers surrounded the sacred building, and guarding every avenue of escape, secured the priest and his whole congregation.

Meanwhile the investigations which had taken place in Britain, after the flight of Evanus, had completely convinced Constantine of the identity of the young gladiator with Eachan, the son of Aëdh, his preserver. Lutatius had not survived his wound beyond a few minutes, and no information had been obtained from him, but the dagger bearing the impressed letter "C," which was found in the very bed chamber of the Emperor, was recognised immediately by Constantine, as one which he had lost on the memorable night of his captivity amongst the Druids.

A most searching investigation took place, which disclosed the fact that two fugitives had traversed the country from the ford beneath the villa to Anderida, and had afterwards posted through the province of Gaul, which was included in the dominions of Constantine, on their road to Italy.

At the earnest desire of Helena, Agathus, her confidential chaplain, undertook the perilous journey to Rome, which ended as our readers are aware.

These facts were only partially communicated to Aithne; she only learned that the young gladiator had disappeared, probably, people said, from reluctance to continue his bloody occupation.

Such was the state of things when a letter arrived from Rome, addressed to the Church at Durocina.

MARCELLUS, *Bishop of Rome, with his Priests and Deacons, to the Faithful at Durocina.*

HEALTH IN THE LORD.

Through the blessing of God upon the labours of our brother Agathus, the young gladiator whom he sought has been received into the number of our Catechumens.

He states that he is the son of a Caledonian chieftain named Aedh, that he was captured by the legions after the death of his father, and, although he had been instrumental in saving the life of the Cæsar, under whom you enjoy health and the divine Benediction, was yet sold as a slave to one Terentius, with whom he remained but a short time.

He adds that he was afterwards bought by a lanista named Lutatius, and became a gladiator, and, being concerned in some affray, fled the country in company with an agent of Maxentius whom they call Pompeianus.

The tyrant, for some reason, exposed him to destruction, and when he escaped the sword which was intended to slay him, bade him become the instrument of his bloody will, and the slayer of our martyred sister, Prudentia, who has gloriously won her crown. Refusing to comply, he was in the utmost danger, and we have, as we trust, been the humble instruments of saving his body from the sword, and his soul from the raging lion, even Satan.

He states that his mother is named Aithne, but our people call her Lucia, that she resides with the Empress Helena, at a villa upon the Isis, near your city, that she is of the Faithful.

Comfort the mother's heart, therefore, with these words, and bid her be of good cheer, for the prodigal was lost and is found, and even now his feet are shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, while the white robe of baptism, and the banquet which the initiated know, awaits him in God's own time.

When the search for him, which is now very severe, has ceased, he shall be sent with our prayers for his welfare, that he may be the comfort of his mother in her old age. Truly is it written that the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever.

From our place in the city of Rome, on the natal day of the blessed Callistus, our martyred predecessor.

How eagerly Aithne read this precious epistle; how she counted the weeks as they flew by, and longed to welcome her dear boy, with all the intensity of a mother's love; but alas, hope deferred was already making the heart sick, when one sad day, she saw by the expression of the face of her kind friend, the Empress, that something was amiss. She could not rest till she had learned the fatal truth; another epistle from Rome had reached Durocina. It was as follows:—

MARCELLUS, *Bishop of Rome, with the Priests, Deacons, and Brethren, to the Faithful at Durocina.*

HEALTH IN THE LORD.

Alas! we have tidings of sorrow and yet of joy; the wolf has been permitted once more to break into our fold, for the further trial of our Faith.

A number of Catechumens had been sent by us to prepare for their Baptism in a mountain village, where the Faithful had long sojourned in peace. On the eve of Pentecost they were admitted into the blessed company of the Faithful, were partakers of the hidden manna, when it pleased

Him of Whom are all things to shorten their probation, and to lead them straight through the Red Sea of blood into their promised possession.

A troop of the heathen surrounded the church, and all were taken, amongst them the son of Lucia, who had been baptized by the name "Evanus," "the grace of God" being singularly manifested in him as a chosen vessel.

We have heard no particulars of their passion, but will write all when we can tell you by what manner of death they have glorified God. Pray for us, that we may also be worthy resisting unto blood, to sit down at the Heavenly Banquet.

Assure Lucia that she is not forgotten in our prayers, and remind her that she has yet another treasure laid up for her in the heavenly mansions of the new Jerusalem,—her boy probably singeth there, amidst the white-robed and blood-washed throng, who bear the conquerors' palm.

And pray also for us, that enduring likewise to the end, our lot may be there at the last.

From our place the second Lord's Day after Pentecost.

And she strove to rejoice; and when in the celebration of the Holy Mysteries, the names of the departed were read from the diptychs, she thought of him as awaiting her there. "He is but as it were in the next room to me," she said, "when I kneel before the *earthly* and he before the *heavenly* altar,—I in the *narthex*, he in the *sanctuary*."

But Constantine, who was most deeply interested in the welfare of his young preserver, did not allow his own exertions to be wanting. He even condescended to make a special request to Maxentius, that Agathus and Evanus should be sought out and restored to him, the one as the chaplain of his mother, the other as his preserver from the Druids.

Maxentius was not in a position to refuse the request openly, for it was of the utmost importance to him to secure the aid of Constantine against the common foe, Galerius.

Therefore he replied that after long enquiries he was unable to learn aught about Evanus. But, after a brief captivity, Agathus, whom the tyrant did not know otherwise than as named by Constantine, was restored from confinement in a loathsome dungeon, from which he had supposed he would but emerge to meet the lion.

We need hardly say how he was welcomed, but he brought no fresh tidings of Evanus, from whom he had been separated at once when the catastrophe happened, and he could only mingle his prayers with those of the mother.

CHAPTER V.

CONSTANTINE AGAIN.

FIVE years had passed away, and great changes had taken place in the Roman empire.

Galerius, the instigator of the great Tenth persecution, had gone to his last account; he died at his palace in Nicomedia, where he had spent that fatal winter, in which he had instigated Diocletian to commence the persecution. In his last days, when his case had become hopeless, and the same sad fate which had overtaken Herod in his pride was slowly consuming his very vitals, he sent to ask the prayers of the afflicted Church, a request which we may feel sure was most heartily granted; and so he died, having previously proclaimed the repeal of the persecuting edicts.

His successor in the empire of the east, Licinius, unwarned by the fate of his predecessor, disregarded his last wishes, and continued the persecution.

Meanwhile, Maxentius, having made an alliance with Constantine, as his father, Maximian, suggested, ruled at Rome with great cruelty, and gave the full rein to his sensual appetites. The unhappy

Severus, having fallen into his power, had only the favour of an easy death and an imperial funeral given him; he chose to open his veins and bleed to death, and was buried with all due honour.

Cruel and rapacious, the lives of the senators were exposed to his jealousy, their estates to his cupidity; he passed his indolent life in the unbounded gratification of his sensual appetites, and seemed but to live that he might wallow in luxury, debauchery, and sloth.

Meanwhile, under the rule of Constantine, the western provinces of the empire, Britain, Spain, and Gaul, enjoyed the utmost happiness which the character of the times permitted them to enjoy; but although he viewed the vices of Maxentius with abhorrence, and the condition of the Romans with compassion, Constantine would probably have hesitated long, ere he had taken up arms to punish the one, or relieve the other, had not the tyrant of Italy furnished him with the fullest justification—*necessity*.

For Maxentius had fully made up his mind to be the sole ruler of the Roman world, and after offering the grossest insults to the patient Constantine, proceeded to make military preparations on such a scale, that much as the latter might deplore the necessity of war, he felt that the only path of safety lay in vigorous action.

So, collecting the legions in Britain, and enrolling the British youth in great numbers, he crossed the channel; the legions of Gaul augmented his forces; forces came in from Spain, and he assembled on the Gallic plains an army of ninety thousand foot and eight thousand horse.

But his adversary rejoiced in more imposing numbers; the Italian legions, augmented by the Moors and Carthaginians, amounted to one hundred and seventy thousand foot and eighteen thousand horse.

But on the one side was valour, justice, and wisdom; on the other, rashness, injustice, and folly.

And upon the one side hung all the hope of the afflicted Church of Christ; on the other, the hope of the decaying Paganism; the one went forth with the prayers and sacrifices of the Church offered unceasingly in his behalf; the other blessed, or rather cursed, by the dying rites of the heathen altars.

Constantine was not yet a Christian, but he was the protector of Christians, and his own inclinations were well known both to the Faithful and the Pagans; as yet he hesitated, not yet convinced, but still in doubt.

The stupendous highways, which the Romans had carried over the Alps, opened several communications between Gaul and Italy; Constantine chose the road over the Cottian Alps, or, as it is now called, the road over Mont Cenis, where the skill of this later age has constructed the summit railway, and later the famous tunnel.

There was no difficulty in the passage; it was unresisted; for so rapid was the march of Constantine, that he was in Italy while Maxentius supposed him on the Rhine.

The city of Susa closed its gates, but the fiery valour of Constantine's troops, disdaining the tedious forms of a siege, carried it at once by storm; the flames were extinguished by the care of the merciful conqueror, and the survivors rescued from destruction.

Forty miles hence a more severe contest awaited him; the Italian legions were assembled under the lieutenants of Maxentius on the plains of Turin.

Like Cæsar, Constantine might have written "veni, vidi, vici;" the troops of Maxentius fled in utter confusion towards Turin; the inhabitants of that city shut their gates, and few of the fugitives escaped the sword of the Celtic legions.

Milan opened its gates to the victor, and almost all the cities between the Alps and the Po not only acknowledged the power, but embraced with zeal the party of Constantine.

He was now only four hundred miles from Rome, and the Æmilian and Flaminian highways offered an easy march, but he first turned aside to meet the immense army our old acquaintance, Pompeianus, had concentrated in the province of Venetia, near Verona.

The numbers of the Italians far exceeded the forces of Constantine, but so skilful was his generalship, that after a fearful carnage, which endured through the whole of a moonlight night, the dawn found him in possession of the field; Pompeianus was amongst the slain, and Verona surrendered at discretion.

So conspicuous had been the valour of Constantine, that the officers of his army formed a deputation to beg him to pay more regard to the preservation of a life so precious to the Roman world.

Meanwhile, Maxentius was still wallowing in luxury and sloth; no one dared at first to tell him the true state of affairs, but at length his principal officers united in doing so.

Startled and alarmed, he gave orders to the Prætorian guards to take the field; the sharers of his cruel deeds, they were too deeply implicated not to be well aware that they must stand or fall with him, whom they had first proclaimed Emperor, and of whose crimes they had been the ministers from that day forward.

Around them, as a nucleus, Maxentius gathered a yet larger force than Constantine had previously coped with. It was not his first intention to lead them in person, for he was but a coward, as the reader has already seen, but he could not endure the contempt of the Roman citizens, who made the public places resound with songs, in which they ridiculed his cowardice, and extolled his valiant rival.

So he controlled his rising fears by a desperate effort, and, leaving Rome, encamped with his legions at a spot called Saxa Rubra, but ten miles from Rome. His numerous forces covered the plain, and behind them the river Tiber protected the rear guard, while it left no alternative, save victory or death, retreat being thus rendered almost impossible.

It was the evening of the twenty-seventh of October, A.D. 312, and the victorious legions of Constantine were approaching the close of the weary day's march; all were in the highest spirits, for repeated triumphs had filled them with that confidence in themselves and their leader which is the surest pledge of success in the field.

In the rear of the army, surrounded by his staff, rode Constantine himself, somewhat changed in appearance by the cares and responsibilities of the five years which had passed since we introduced him to our readers.

He was silent, rapt, as he afterwards told his confidential friend and spiritual adviser, Eusebius, in meditation upon the uncertainty of life, and the various opinions prevalent amongst mankind respecting the immortality of the soul. Well might he thus ponder, for the morrow was before him, that morrow which he knew must conduct him to empire or the grave.

The arguments in favour of the truth of Christianity were indeed familiar to him, since it was the Faith of his mother; yet the many difficulties which the wise of this world will ever find in our mysterious Creed, had contributed to keep him yet in doubt, without the pale of the Church.

"Oh, Eternal Wisdom," he said, speaking in utter abstraction, "Oh, Eternal Wisdom, if Thou be indeed the God of the Christians, reveal Thyself to me, that I may adore."

Thus he thought, and thus he poured forth his prayers to the unknown God, Who at this solemn crisis, not only in the history of Constantine, but of the Church, answered by fire. For suddenly a glare of light caused every person to look with astonished gaze into the heavens; there, rivalling the sun in brightness, was a mysterious phenomenon.

A glittering cross of fire appeared in the sky, with the inscription, "*In hoc signo vinces*"—In this sign thou shalt conquer.*

The Emperor paused in astonishment and awe, and raising his hands in adoration, solemnly vowed to devote his life to the service of Christ, and to use all his energies in the propagation of Chris-

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* See *Note V.*

tianity, if life and victory were granted him for that purpose.

The soldiers, who had also seen the wondrous vision, interpreted it according to their respective belief; those who were attached to Paganism pronouncing it a most unfortunate omen, but those, and they were many, who were attached to the Christian Faith, thanked God with all their hearts, and took courage.

At this moment the scouts came riding back from the front, and the advanced guard halted; the legions of Maxentius were in sight.

Constantine, attended by his staff, galloped forward, and, from a slight eminence, perceived a vast plain before him, terminated by the Tiber, and entirely occupied by the camp of his foes.

"God," he said, solemnly, "has delivered them into our hands,—the God of the Christians,—I commit our cause to Him."

Immediately he gave orders to encamp for the night, and with the utmost celerity the space was marked out; the pioneers levelled the ground, removing every impediment which might interrupt its perfect regularity.

Its form was that of a square, of about three or four thousand yards; in the midst rose the imperial tent; the cavalry and infantry of the three nations, of which the army was principally composed, took their several stations; the streets between the tents were broad and straight, and a vacant space of two hundred feet was left between the tents and the rampart, which was itself twelve feet high, and defended by a ditch twelve feet deep and twelve feet broad, the spade and pickaxe being as familiar to the Roman legionary as the sword or javelin.

After holding a council of his principal officers, the Emperor was about to rest, when Lucilianus, still his confidential secretary, appeared, and informed him that a young man sought an interview with him.

"Can you not learn his business," said the Emperor, "and transact it yourself?"

"He has satisfied me, my Lord, that it is a subject which you would probably wish to reserve for your own hearing; he is a Caledonian, but has long been in captivity as a Christian in the mines amongst the mountains; our victories have given him and his fellow captives their liberty, the oppressors having fled."

"Remain here, Lucilianus; order the sentinel to admit him."

The hangings veiling the entrance to the tent were lifted, and a young man, plainly but neatly dressed, stood with reverence beneath the lamp, which swung from the pole supporting the roof.

"Who art thou," asked Constantine.

The visitor raised his eyes to the Emperor, and bending low seemed unable to speak; at last he stammered, in broken accents,—

"My Lord, once it pleased God through me to save your life; I come, in return, to ask one boon, —pardon, and permission to devote my life to your service, to fight in your cause to-morrow."

"Good heavens," said Constantine, "can it be? Say, art thou a Caledonian? methinks I recal your features."

"I am Eachan, the son of Aëdh, now known by my baptismal name, Evanus."

"And thy mother?"

"She was known to you as Lucia, to my people as Aithne; I am her most unworthy son."

"Lucilianus," said the Emperor, speaking with an agitated voice, "leave us alone; there is no treachery here. Eachan—Evanus, tell me all; I know you now. Nay, do not weep; thou art a man now. Where hast thou been all these years? Why didst thou not claim my protection? Tell me all. It was, then, as I thought, thou who didst fight with the cestus in the games at Durocina? I owe thee a life, and would have saved thee then."

He raised the suppliant as he spoke, and, as Lucilianus left the room, Evanus, with a broken voice, began his sad tale.

He concealed nothing, but told of the plot formed by Pompeianus, and of its frustration. Constantine perfectly understood the circumstances, for the subsequent enquiries, after the death of Lutatius, had, as we have already seen, disclosed nearly the whole truth.

"But why hast thou not sought me before?" said Constantine; "surely thou didst not doubt my forgiveness."

The substance of the reply of Evanus was as follows:—

When the little colony of Christians had been seized by the soldiers, as before narrated, they had been differently disposed of. Some had been sent at once to supply the amphitheatres, but others, who were young and strong, had been compelled to labour in the mines, under the most rigorous surveillance, such as to render life nearly insupportable and escape impossible, and Evanus, unrecognised as the young gladiator sought after by the Emperor, was amongst them. Yet so great had been the number of Christians, that their overseers, thinking that it was necessary to keep their captives in good spirits if they would make their mines lucrative, had even connived at Christian worship, feeling that they might thus reconcile their hapless slaves to their lot, and double the value of their labour. Thus the time had not been one of such fearful suffering as it would have been had it been unrelieved by the consolations of religion; for there were many clergy in the mines, and they had not failed to remind their fellow slaves of the eternal weight of glory which would reward those who patiently endured the light affliction of the moment, —light in comparison.

But the rapid advance of the conquering legions of Constantine had driven the agents of Maxentius to seek shelter in Rome, and thus their slaves had gained freedom after years of bondage.

It had been indeed a precious boon to Evanus, the moment he had prayed for had arrived; at last he could obtain pardon for his intended crime,—at last he could hear of his dear mother, whose sorrow had been the bitterest thought when he languished in hopeless captivity.

He dreaded to ask whether she was yet alive, but Constantine anticipated the question.

"Be of good cheer, thy mother yet lives."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MILVIAN BRIDGE.

THE still hours of the night, that night of suspense, glided away, and silence reigned in the imperial tent. The Emperor reposed upon his hard camp bed, and upon a similar pallet slept the pardoned Evanus, thus receiving the most touching proof of the confidence and forgiveness of Constantine.

Yes, he whose couch was that of a slave in the mines but a few days before, now shared the tent of the Emperor of the West.

Twice or thrice in the darkness of that night Constantine started from his feet and looked around him. Once Evanus caught his glance by the flickering light of the lamp which swung from the roof, and it was as that of one in a trance.

"Evanus saw you nothing? heard you nothing; are you awake?"

"My Lord, I have not seen or heard aught."

"It must have been a dream; methought He of Nazareth was here with bleeding hands and feet. 'See,' He said, 'they yet bleed in the suffering members of My mystical Body. Wilt thou be the deliverer of My people?'"

"And, my Lord," exclaimed Evanus.

"I replied, 'Behold I am Thy servant, and the son of Thine handmaid.' Then, he bade me make His Cross my banner, and victory should follow where it led."

"My Lord," said Evanus, "you will obey the call; you will, will you not?"

"By His help; but we must rest now; but tell me, you have obeyed it, has it brought *you* joy?"

"My Lord, I could not otherwise have survived five years in the mines."

"Evanus, pray that I may have strength to accept the call."

And once more all was silence throughout the camp. Men slept—many their last sleep—and only the sentinels were awake.

But, at length, the first faint blush of dawn appeared, and instantly a burst of trumpets broke the silence of the night.

Then came the answering signal from the hostile camp of Maxentius.

A murmur of many voices arose, the soldiers prepared their hasty meal, and then, at the appointed signal, fell into their places on the open declivity before the camp, division after division taking its appointed station, the foot soldiers occupying the centre, the cavalry posted upon the wings.

The foot soldiers of each legion were drawn up eight men deep, and the regular distance of three feet was left between the files, as well as between the ranks.

They wore open helmets with lofty crests, breast-plates, greaves on the legs, and bore bucklers for defence; their weapons consisting of the formidable pilum and the lighter javelin, with a short sword of Spanish steel.

When all were in array the Emperor appeared in glittering armour, just as the sun arose; and by his side stood Evanus, bearing a standard which had never before greeted the eyes of Roman soldiers.

It was the "Labarum."

This first Christian standard was made in the form of a cross, overlaid with gold and surmounted by a royal crown, adorned with jewels. From the tranverse arm of the cross hung a veil of cloth of gold, bearing the sacred monogram.

"Behold, my fellow-soldiers," said the Emperor, "the banner beneath which you will march to victory, revealed to me by God Himself in the visions of the night."

Fifty chosen warriors from the ranks of his Christian soldiers were now assembled in the front, and to them the Emperor solemnly committed the standard, charging them to protect it with their lives, and it would (so he said) protect them.

Evanus was one of the fifty, and, as we have seen, the standard-bearer: and around him he recognized many of his own remote land, chosen like him to bear the standard of the King of kings into the midst of His foes.

And now each legion and division of the army took its appointed place on the gently rising ground, beneath which lay the plain covered by the troops of Maxentius, and the opposing hosts confronted each other in death-like silence, the silence of brave men ere they meet in the death grapple.

Evanus, who was posted at the right flank, gazed for a few brief moments at the scene; his heart was beating quickly with the intense suspense, and he felt *not fear*, but that indescribable feeling which generally precedes the moment, when all the energies of body and mind must be concentrated in the struggle for life or death.

Yet, without noting it much at the time, the scene impressed itself upon him so vividly that it became imprinted upon his memory for life.

The long front of the opposing army extended across the plain. In the centre were the famous Prætorian guards, some forty thousand strong, who had raised Maxentius to the throne, and were fated to share his doom.

The swarthy forms of Moorish and Numidian cavalry occupied the wings, and protected the flanks, large bodies of Italian legions completing the array, and occupying the posts between the cavalry and the Prætorians.

Beyond rolled the Tiber, like a silver thread in the distance, cutting off all hope of retreat, signifying that the choice of Maxentius, as of his rival, was to conquer or die; indeed, no other course was open to him.

There was but one avenue by which to retreat, and that was a solitary wooden bridge, over which the great highway leading to Rome, and which intersected the plain, took its course.

Upon this spot, for some undefinable reason, the eyes of Evanus fixed themselves, as if he felt that it was connected with the crisis of the fate of the day.

The voice of Constantine, as he put himself at the head of his Celtic horse on the right way, broke the solemn silence—

"Fellow-soldiers,—We are here to conquer or to die. Hitherto our course has been one of unbroken victory. Yonder the effeminate slaves of the tyrant await you, and you know your work. For me this sun which gilds my armour, with its rising beams, shall leave me, at its setting, the victor or a corpse. Your dangers are mine, mine yours, and our cause is the cause of God."

The deafening cheers which followed the Emperor's words had hardly died away, when the whole body of cavalry charged down the slope upon the right wing of the opposing force, which was protected by the African cavalry.

The Africans, nothing loth, spurred their horses to meet the shock, and the conflict was like that of two solid masses, the sounds of armour and weapon, coming into contact with weapon and armour, was like the clash of two opposing walls of steel, and its ominous sound sent a sensation of awe through both armies. But the greater weight and force of the Celtic horse gave them the advantage over their lighter antagonists, and in a few moments their enemies were seen to waver and then yield, and finally to fly in all directions, while the ground was covered with dead and dying.

Their flight left the Prætorian guard—the very life-guard of Maxentius—exposed, and Constantine rallied his horse at a little distance, and charged upon the line of bristling points which they presented; but perfect in their discipline, and brave as the bravest, they stood firm, and the squadrons of horse retreated with loss.

Stained with blood as they were, they had made up their minds for victory or death, and had solemnly pledged their word to each other to stand or fall together.

Maxentius was *their* Emperor. Under his name they had ruled Rome. They had strangled his prey and shared the spoil, and they fought for very life as they well knew.

But Constantine feeling that the whole issue of the battle depended upon the breaking their close and serried array, drew up his cavalry with the greatest care, addressed them with spirit, put himself at their head, and prepared once more to dash at the hostile Prætorians, to break in amongst them, or to die.

At the same moment orders were conveyed to the horse on the left wing to charge simultaneously upon the horse opposed to them, while the Celtic foot, were ordered to form themselves into the *caucus* (or wedge), and charge at the front.

Such was the position of affairs on the side of Constantine at the close of the first scene of the battle. On the other hand, the troops of Maxentius changed their order to that of the *forfex* (resembling a pair of shears) to receive the Celtic forces, who were evidently about to charge in wedge-like array; on their left, the Prætorians formed to receive cavalry; on their right, the cavalry, yet unsubdued, prepared to anticipate the expected attack from Constantine's left wing.

The Prætorians had withdrawn their first and second lines, so as to form one solid mass in union with the third rank, their heavy pila (or spears) ready to present before them; their lighter javelins in each man's hand, to dart at the approaching horse; while in the intervals African sagittarii, or archers, prepared to send their flights of arrows.

The decisive moment came. Constantine, after previously sending an order to Evanus, who, as standard-bearer of the fifty, had been awaiting amongst the reserves the order to charge, gave the signal, and instantly the sounds of conflict arose.

The opposing cavalry contended on either flank, the wedge came into collision with the curved line of the forfex in the front, and drove the first line back upon the second, but all was yet in doubt, for as yet the ranks of the Prætorians were unbroken, and the Celtic cavalry had lost large numbers in the vain attempt to break them.

In vain Constantine rallied and charged again, no opening could be made, and without an opening all would be in vain.

Then in that critical moment there was a sound as of a whirlwind, and the fifty with the Labarum came like a flash of lightning upon the ranks of the Prætorian guard.

The rest of the cavalry paused one moment, and watched the collision, eager to second the blow, if successful, mad with the excitement of conflict. They watched with bated breath as the fifty dashed over the blood-stained field. They watched as they lessened the distance between themselves and the line of weapons. They watched as the shower of javelins and arrows whistled *harmlessly* past them. They watched the shock. The Prætorians *broke*, as a feeble breakwater breaks before a massive wave driven before the gale.

Broke, yes, broke; and the fifty were amongst them, leaving a huge opening. And while the troops of Maxentius raised a cry of despair, through and upon that opening poured the British horse, the Gallic horse, the Spanish horse. The Prætorians made no attempt to fly. They died like heroes, as they stood, each man in his place; but the battle was lost; the Labarum had done its work; victory had followed where it led, according to the prophecy.

For, at that moment, the wedge penetrated the line of foot in front; and in vain did the Italians and Africans strive to throw themselves into the form of the *globus*, they only protracted the inevitable catastrophe. On the left way their cavalry had been partially successful, but, recalled to support the infantry, found everything in inextricable confusion.

A confused and horrible scene followed, as though a hundred reapers, with sharpened scythes, were mowing a field of ripened corn; so did the sword mow down the legions of Maxentius.

Cries of "All is lost, all is lost," resounded over the field. "Save who can," "Fly, fly." While as men saw the Labarum they shouted "Magic, magic; it is useless to resist."

But how could they fly: the river was on one side, the foe on the other; and there was but one wooden bridge, which was already crowded with fugitives.

Those who could swim divested themselves of their armour, and plunged into the stream; and many who could not, in the excess of their fright, followed the example, and were carried away by the flood of the Tiber, which was swollen from recent rains.

Maxentius, surrounded by a body of devoted friends, so soon as the ranks of the Prætorians were broken, strove to reach the Milvian Bridge, but there were many before him; and, although his soldiers sabred all who impeded their course, still even the sword could not hew a way through the living mass of fugitives.

At last the bridge was gained, but not till the dusk of the October evening was settling upon the scene, and horrors seemed multiplied in that ghastly twilight; still they pressed on.

And all at once the bridge cracked. There was a cry of horror. It gaped, and the shriek rose above the roar of battle. The planks came asunder, the poles gave way, and slowly the further portion of the bridge sank into the stream with its burden of living struggling beings, grasping at each other, clinging to planks, drawn down by the weight of their armour, while yet the northern end remained intact.

Listen! What means that renewed outcry, that hideous uproar?

The Gallic horse are close upon the flanks of the helpless multitude, cutting, hewing, slaying. The Prætorians are all dead or dying, and they who are left are no longer soldiers, but fugitives, who, maddened by fear, press on for the bridge.

Alas ! it is broken, and they know it not.

Closer, closer yet, rises the hubbub; closer, closer. The very sound of the blows, and the groans of the victims, drown the cries of those who vainly shout, "The Bridge is broken !" "The Bridge is broken."

At that moment Maxentius enters upon the bridge. It is dusk; they cannot learn by the eye that it is but a trap—that the further arches are gone. They press onward. "Hasten ! hasten !" "Constantine is behind !" "Listen to that sound !" "Constantine ! Constantine !" "Maxentius, where are now thy false gods? Where now the promises of the Augurs and Flamens? The Labarum is behind; it will reach the bridge."

"Onward, onward !"

"What is that horrible sound of splashing, falling bodies?"

"Back, back; the bridge is broken !"

"Onward, ever onward; the Labarum approaches !"

"Back !" screamed Maxentius, "drive them back with your swords; we shall be driven into the flood! I have my armour on; I shall sink! Back, guards! drive them back! I am the Emperor! I am Maxentius!"

Still the irresistible force presses them remorsely on, and still the cry rises behind—"Constantine! Constantine!" and the clash of steel, and the cries of the victims, grow louder. The sword behind; the flood before.

Now Maxentius clings to a post of the bridge; he is torn from it by the pressure. Now his guards present their weapons to those behind. The weapons pierce living bodies, but the pressure continues all the same. Now he is forced to the last plank; he clings with desperate energy; the feet are forced over the edge; one hand has lost its hold; now the other; and Rome's imperial purple sinks into the stream, the heavy armour carrying the hapless Emperor to the bottom.

Still, like water from a spout, the living tide pours over the verge. Still the deep waters receive their prey, until the darkness of the night brings forth silence and death.

The forces of Constantine are recalled to their camp for there is no enemy to pursue. Pagan Rome has fallen. God has avenged His elect.

CHAPTER VII.

AITHNE.

ONCE again we must use the privilege peculiar to authors, and transport our readers to the villa on the cliff above the Isis, near the ancient city of Durocina.

Slowly had the intervening five years passed away since we last visited its precincts, for it was five years since the final intelligence which had crushed the mother's hope of meeting her boy in this world, and they had accomplished the work of many years upon the loving and yet patient Aithne. Her hair was all silvered with grey; time and affliction had ploughed furrows in her cheeks, yet the same sweet pensive look, which one could only behold to love, was there still.

Often had she been tempted to repine that the fate of her boy was so enveloped in mystery, and that she knew not how brightly divine grace had shone upon him in the last dread conflict; for she felt sure all was long since over, and only thought of him as one of the white-robed throng, awaiting her in the joy of the eternal morning; she felt she had but to wait, and all would yet be known, so far as it was well it should be known.

Meanwhile, the stirring events we have narrated succeeded each other with startling rapidity; the gathering storm blackened the political heaven long before the lightning flash descended, and suspense reached its highest degree when letter after letter announced that Constantine, committing his cause to Heaven, had crossed the Alps, and was hourly expecting to meet his foes.

The Empress Helena remained at her villa in company with Aithne, and it was now the task of the latter to preserve a cheerful countenance, for the sake of her kind friend.

Every week brought tidings from the seat of war, and they heard of the earlier battles of Turin and Verona, and finally of the steady march of Constantine, along the Flaminian highway, to Rome.

The suspense then became most painful, but it was ended at last. One morning, early in November, came the epistle which we present to the reader.

CONSTANTINE, *Augustus, to his beloved Mother.*

God—the Christian's God—has blessed our arms with a mighty victory. Maxentius is no more; Rome is ours; the war is ended; and thy son is, at least in belief, a Christian.

Why, thou shalt learn hereafter.

The son of Aithne yet lives. He was the standard bearer in the late glorious victory, and that standard was the Cross. Yes, under the Cross we routed the legions of Maxentius.

He is worthy of his mother; prepare her to receive him; he shall bear my next despatches to Britain; you shall then learn all from his own lips.

Farewell; we hasten to enter the city; the people pour out in troops to welcome us; we are already moving.

From our camp at Saxa Rubra, the fourth day before the Kalends of November.

The empress was walking upon the lawn when this letter arrived; it was immediately brought to her; she opened it with trembling hands, read but the first sentence, and dropped the tablets.

"Read, Lucia, read," she cried.

Aithne read, and read beyond the point at which the empress had resigned the letter, when she suddenly fainted.

Joy seldom kills, yet it was very long before she was fully restored to consciousness, and then she seemed so utterly weak and exhausted, that they could only administer stimulants, and trust for the result to God. The weak frame had received a shock so intense that the result was very doubtful.

It was the third day; one of those lovely days, when winter seems to have withdrawn his approaches, and the withered yet golden leaves, resigned to their fate, hang without motion on their boughs, waiting the first rude breath of the northern blast.

The domestics moved about the villa with hushed voices and noiseless steps, for the physician had told them that it was the crisis of Aithne's illness, that a few hours would decide her fate for life or death.

The aged priest, Agathus, who had so long been Helena's confidential chaplain, sat by her bedside, but in silence. She was supported by the pillows, so that her calm and yet lovely face was turned towards the window; yet she spoke not, and they knew not whether she was awake. Sweetly the birds sang their songs, as if, poor little warblers, they thought the bright November morn a harbinger of returning spring; or as if (so thought the chaplain) they sang of the peace and joy where eternal spring abides, and never withering flowers.

Suddenly Aithne raised her head, and gazed stedfastly through the window.

"He is coming," she said. "Hush, he comes."

They listened intently; no sound was audible; but her gaze was like that of one who looked through an ethereal opening into the invisible world.

"Yes, he comes," she said; "I hear him approach; it is my boy, my only son."

Helena stepped to the window, and listened intently.

Just beneath the cliff was the ford over the river, and beyond it there was a road through the cultivated country, extending to the twin summits in the distance.

Along this road a horseman was riding rapidly, and even while Helena gazed, the sound of the hoofs became audible, until, plunging into the river at the ford, he was soon on the bank beneath the villa.

The Empress left the room to receive him.

The physician entreated his patient to be calm; there was hardly need to do so, her face was so bright and hopeful, with a quiet joy, too deep for words. She spoke not; steps were heard approaching the chamber; the door opened, and Helena introduced the long lost son.

She uttered one plaintive cry of joy,—"My dear boy, my own dear boy," and folded him in one long, loving embrace.

"Our art is useless here," said the physician, and, followed by all present, he left the room.

We cannot proceed further; such scenes must be left to the imagination; the reader must picture to himself what passed between the loving and deeply tried mother and the penitent son, purified through much affliction.

An hour later the physician entered the room, and looked earnestly at his patient. He seemed somewhat relieved, yet his look was still grave.

Evanus gazed upon him, hung upon his words like one to whom they brought life or death. He took the unresisting hand of the patient, and counted the beating of the throbbing pulse.

"She seems somewhat revived," he said; "by the blessing of God she may yet recover."

The intelligence diffused joy throughout the mansion, yet it was felt that her state was still precarious. She had been long ailing, concealing her own infirmities that she might not be a source of trouble to others, and might comfort Helena in her suspense concerning her imperial son; but now she could dissemble no longer, nature had its way at last.

Yet, that evening, colour returned to the wan cheeks, and she talked lovingly to those around her; her voice seemed, they afterwards said, like a strain of sweet music; every word spoke of content and joy, of realized wishes, of a happiness such as is seldom given below.

"Little more, my boy, have I to live for," she said to her restored son, when he enquired of her health a day or two later, as she was supported by pillows, and sat upon her bed; "I have lived to see thee a Christian; I have lived to know that we are *one* in a bond which can never be severed; and, my child, I were ungrateful did I ask for more."

"For more, mother; you must live for my sake; I cannot spare you, you are my mother, and I have but now found you again after so cruel a separation; I cannot lose you now."

"You must learn to say, my Evanus, 'God's will be done.' He has restored you from the very grave to cheer my dying hour, and you must not grudge me to Him. Truly I may now take up my Nunc Dimittis."

He only answered by his sobs, which he vainly strove to suppress.

Day after day the gentle Aithne sank; it became manifest to all around her that it was but a question of time; yet there was no pain,—simply the decay of nature, as when a lamp expires for want of oil.

Meanwhile, her restored boy was ever by her side; he hardly left her for a moment; when she slept he watched her face, as if he felt it were about to be withdrawn from him, and when she awoke it was his hand which gave her nourishment or smoothed her pillow; and it was evident that the very consciousness of this fact still filled her with pleasure, for when her mental powers became weak she still muttered, "It is no dream—Evanus is here."

But there were visions of a brighter and better world which grew upon the dying mother, and as Evanus watched her, he felt that the joy of the immortal spirit was even reflected upon the tabernacle of clay.

At last it became evident that the end was near, and Agathus administered the last rites of the Church.

She had strength enough and that was all, but faith, hope, and love spoke in those dying eyes, as they all assembled in the chamber of death, and gazed sadly upon her.

Once or twice she attempted to speak, but in vain, and then pointed upwards with a look so radiant that light seemed to pass over the dying countenance. Love to her recovered boy was strong to the last, for she pressed the hand she held to her lips when she could no longer speak.

At last the end came, but they hardly knew when it actually had place ; she had ceased to breathe, and the very wind seemed like the sound of angels' wings as it sighed in mournful cadence without.

Agathus said the commendatory prayer as they all knelt in silent awe ; the very room seemed a sanctuary, as he uttered the solemn words in which he commended the soul of the beloved Aithne into the hands of a most loving Father and merciful Redeemer.

Yes, she was gone, and Agathus comforted the mourning son.

"God spared her for your sake, my child; her one earthly wish accomplished, He has taken her to Himself."

Yes, Evanus had closed her eyes, and sorrow filled his heart, and found vent in tears; yet not the sorrow of those without hope.

One or two of those present raised their voices in lamentation, but they were immediately silenced, for sounds of sorrow seemed to violate the sanctity of that hour.

Then they wound the precious relics in linen, with spices and ointments, after the manner of the first and greatest of all Christian burials, for it was meet for the disciple that she should be as her Lord, who had so lovingly sanctified suffering to the Saint whose death was precious in His sight.

They placed her in an open coffin, with a wreath of flowers around the brow, emblematical of the crown which yet awaited the tabernacle in which the immortal spirit had dwelt, when corruption should be swallowed up in incorruption, and mortality in immortality.

And around the bier they kept watch, and sang hymns of joy and psalms of thanksgiving, for the victory was gained; while, lighted tapers placed around, spoke of the regions of light and peace into which the happy spirit, purified through suffering, had entered.

For three days they thus detained the precious remains amongst them, and on the third day the Bishop and Clergy of the Church at Durocina arrived, to take part in the last offices.

The Bishop proceeded to the Oratory, where a last and most affecting ceremony took place.

Each of those present solemnly kissed the pallid brow of the deceased, while the touching words were sung :—

> Take the last kiss, the last for ever,
> Yet render thanks amidst your gloom,
> She severed from her friends and kindred,
> Is passing onwards towards the tomb,
> For earthly labours, earthly pleasures,
> And carnal joys, she cares no more.
> Where are her kinsfolk and acquaintance?
> They stand upon another shore;
> Let us cry, around her press'd,
> Grant her Lord eternal rest.

Evanus, who had hitherto been successful in restraining his emotion, approached last, and as he bent over the dead, and gazed upon that bier where the look of earthly beauty and love yet lingered, as he marked the calm, nay, the angelic, expression the features had assumed—the heavenly repose which sat upon them—he gave way utterly. "My mother, my dear mother," he exclaimed, and found relief in tears, which fell upon the loved face like scalding rain.

And now with hymns and psalms they went forth, followed by the Faithful, who had assembled from all parts, while torches were borne before and behind the bier, and sweet incense arose with its perfumed breath,—for it was an age of symbolism.

At the end of the gentle ascent formed by the rising ground, just where the smooth lawn broke abruptly on the edge of the cliffs, a small chapel had been built since the cessation of the days of persecution, and around it the bodies of many of the brethren were already interred. This was destined to be the last resting place of Aithne.

They bore the loved remains into the chapel, and the Bishop solemnly celebrated the holy mysteries, which were never omitted at Christian burials, in those days, and an offering of alms was made upon the altar in the name of the deceased, consisting of a large sum of money, to be afterwards distributed amongst the poor.

They proceeded to the grave, and with words of Christian love, and joyful hope, they committed the body to the ground in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, while the poor, to whom Aithne was very dear, and to whom she had been a ministering angel, showered flowers into the open grave, and the solemn strain was raised—

Earth, gentle nurse, the dead receive,
  We trust her to thy breast;
Earth to these holy relics give
  A calm, a holy rest.
Eternal wisdom lived therein,
  And Christ within them moved,
Now let them in thy bosom win
  Sweet rest, oh earth beloved;
The hour is near when all shall glow
  With vernal bloom again,
When the warm blood shall thrill and flow
  Within its ancient fane.
When body shall with soul unite,
And soar from death's cold house to life and light.*

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* See *Note Y.* (Burial of Aithne.)

It was but a few days later, and in the calm light of a bright but wintry eventide, Evanus stood alone by the grave.

He was patient and resigned, nay happy, for he felt that God had been indeed gracious to Him. He had come to bid farewell to the spot where she slept who had loved him with a love so deep.

He was about to leave Britain for Italy, in answer to an earnest appeal from Constantine, who wished to have him about his person, and Agathus, who was deeply interested in his career, had counselled him to accept the call immediately, feeling that in vigorous employment, and energetic labour, the mind of our hero would recover its wonted tone.

While he yet stood and mused Agathus stood by him, but for a long time neither spoke.

"God has been very good to you, my son," said the Priest, breaking the silence at last.

"He has, indeed, I feel it in my very heart; but it is not strange that I should weep one hour for her who has wept for me during her whole life."

"You would not wish to recall her to life from the glory which is now hers?"

"No; I can say 'God's will be done.'"

"His hand has been in all this. Think how His love was manifested to her and in her, and chiefly, perhaps, in this, that as a wandering sheep you have been granted to her prayers, and restored to the fold."

"And she does not cease to love me, to pray for me."

"God forbid, faith and hope shall pass away; but charity, that is love, endureth for ever. She awaits you, and, meanwhile, her prayers yet plead for you; that, like her, you may accomplish your course with joy. Meanwhile, let the remembrance of your mother bring you nearer to the Lord of Life, in whom you are both *one*."

"It shall, God being my helper; standing here over her grave, I would dedicate my life to Him, Who has given me to her prayers."

They said no more, but their hands were clasped, as their tears fell upon the hallowed soil, until Evanus tore himself from the spot, and entered the chariot which awaited him beneath the hill, in the care of imperial outriders.

Agathus gazed upon the departing chariot, from the elevated spot on which he stood. It crossed the ford, and rapidly lessened in the distance; but, so long as it was in sight, he fancied he saw its occupant casting a longing lingering look behind.

As the chariot crossed the ridge, which afforded the last view of the little chapel and cemetery, Evanus looked back. The sun was just sinking in the west, and a flood of crimson and golden light lingered upon the elevation whereon it stood, bringing every feature of the spot into prominence.

Some words which had cheered him in his darkest hours in the mines now came to his remembrance with wondrous force, for they seemed to have been prophetical of the happy close of his dear mother's life,—"*At eventide it shall be light.*"

And here let us leave him safe in the protection of his God. Need we say that his manhood fulfilled the pledge given at his mother's grave?

See *Note Z.* (Decay of the Roman power.)

FINIS.

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NOTES.

NOTE A, page 10. *The Druids in Scotland.* It appears, from much contemporaneous evidence, that when the Druids had disappeared in Southern Britain, before the civilization of Rome, they still held their ground amidst the fastnesses of the Grampians, or the yet more remote islands of the West. The principal seat of their worship in Scotland appears to have been on the site of the modern parish of Kirk-michæl, in Perthshire, near the great mountain ranges, into which they could easily retreat when pressed by the Roman arms. More than a century later than the date of our tale, when S. Columba and his heroic brethren laboured to bring the Caledonians within the fold of the Church, they found the Druidical religion established everywhere, and its fierce priesthood in full power, but from that time it gradually disappeared before the Faith of Christ. (See Montalembert's Life of S. Columba.)

NOTE B, page 31. *The First of May.* A curious relic of the custom of hallowing fire on the first of May (or, in some cases, Midsummer day,) has descended even to our days. It was customary in very recent times, in certain secluded parts of the Highlands, to call May-day "*Beltein*," that is, the day of the Bel-Fire, and imitations of the old superstitions were generally performed, a kind of sacrifice being offered up, lots taken, and the person on whom the lot fell, forced to leap three times through the flames of the fire. The adoration of fire was conceived by the Druids to be due to that element, as to one of the great principles of nature, and their ceremonies were generally performed in groves similar to that described in the text.

NOTE C, page 40. *Celtic Warfare.* A brief examination of the contests between the Romans and Britons must convince the reader of their skill in the art of war, and that they were very unlike the savages of modern days, to whom it is the fashion to compare them. Otherwise the difficulty with which the southern Britons were partially subdued by Cæsar, and the northern by Agricola, would reflect discredit on those great captains. A great fondness for horses appears to have been a peculiarity of these nations, and both cavalry and chariots were employed by Cassivellaunus in the south, and Galgacus in the north, as Cæsar and Tacitus respectively bear witness.

NOTE D, page 58. *Durocina.* In Durocina the tourist familiar with the Thames will at once recognise (the Oxfordshire) Dorchester, famed for its noble Abbey Church, a grand relic of mediæval ages. Although now only a village, it derives its origin from a period so remote that it is lost in the mist of ages. It was probably a British village under the name Kair Dauri, which may be interpreted, the city (or camp) on the waters, long before the advent of the Romans; and coins of Cunobelin have been found in good preservation, after whom the Wittenham Clumps were called Synodune or Cuno's Hill. Bede mentions it as "Civitas Dorcinia," but it is marked as a Roman station, under the name Durocina, in the XVIII. Iter of Richard of Cirencester, which name has been adhered to in the text. Coins of the date of our tale have been found in great abundance, indicating that the neighbourhood was then thickly inhabited. In the year 1866, while digging foundations for the vicarage, the workmen came upon a large earthenware jar, at the depth of four feet, containing three glass vases of beautiful form, besides fragments of burnt bone, and pottery mixed with earth.

NOTE E, page 70. *The Roman occupation of Britain.* In the early days of the Roman occupation, Britain was always spoken of as a land of chilling mists and sunless days, but in the times of our tale Britain had even become a favourite place of residence. Order and magnificence, arts and literature, took the place of the anarchy and ignorance of the natives whom Cæsar found; cultivation became extended, forests were swept away, roads formed, and stately arches built. The energetic proceedings of Adrian and Severus had put a stop to the barbarian incursions, and scarcely any event disturbed the peace of the colony during the second and third centuries, so that it was probably in as happy a condition as any part of the empire and in possession of all the civilisation of Rome. Thus the orator, Eumenius, in his panegyric on Constantine, exclaims, "O fortunate Britain, nature has enriched thee with the choicest blessings of heaven and earth; thou sufferest not the scorching heat of summer, or the intense cold of winter; thy harvests reward labour with so vast an increase, as to supply thy tables bountifully with bread and thy cellars with wine; thy woods have no savage beasts, no serpents to harm the traveller; innumerable are thy flocks and herds, which feed thee plentifully, and clothe thee richly."

Again, we learn from Gibbon, that when the island, in the close of the third century—a few years only before the date of our tale—was separated from the empire, the Romans, in their grief at the successful rebellion of Carausius, celebrated, and perhaps magnified "the extent of that noble island, provided on every side with convenient harbours, the temperature of the climate and the fertility of the soil, alike adapted for the production of corn or of vines, its rich pastures covered with innumerable flocks," etc., etc. (See the Panegyric of Eumenius.)

NOTE F, page 71. *The Invasion of Aulus Plautius.* In Dion Cassius we read that in 43 A.D. Aulus Plautius was "imperator" in Britain, and was opposed by the two sons of Cymbeline or Cyno, Caractacus and Togodunus (or Togodumnus). Plautius prevailed, and pursued his victory till he came to a "*certain river*," which the Britons supposed he could not pass in the absence of a bridge, and in consequence took up their position carelessly on the opposite bank. Plautius sent forth the Celti, who were accustomed to swim with ease across the most rapid river; they crossed, wounded the horses which drew the chariots, and overcame the Britons; then Vespasian followed, with his brother Sabinus, and, passing the river at a "certain place," completed their victory, killing Togodunus, and driving them down the river to the mouth of the Thames.

The scene of this victory was probably Dorchester, as many competent authorities have asserted, although others place it elsewhere; but the authority appears amply sufficient to justify the assumption in a work of fiction.

NOTE G, page 72. *The Roman villa.* A general description of the ordinary Roman villa may somewhat assist the reader in comprehending the events of the tale. The ground floor consisted of,

1. The *Ostium* (or porch), leading to the *Atrium* or Hall, with chambers on each side.
2. The *Atrium*, with a fountain, called the *Impluvium*, in the centre, surrounded by *Cubicula*, or sleeping chambers for the family, open to the sky, and terminated by the *Tablinum*, or library, and the smaller *Triclinium*, or dining-room, between which a passage in a line with the *Ostium* led to
3. The *Peristylium*, or larger court, with Doric columns, surrounding a garden in the centre, and usually surrounded by *Cubicula*, one of the larger chambers opening from it being the greater *Triclinium* used for state occasions.

The discoveries made at Pompeii prove that glass was used for windows under the earlier emperors, and its use rapidly extended. The rooms were generally heated by hot air, stoves being very seldom employed, and chimneys scarcely ever; although not entirely unknown, as some have been found in ancient ruins.

Of course there must have been much variety of detail, but the general arrangement was much as we have described, and with few modifications dwellers of the upper class in Britain imitated Roman architecture.

NOTE H, page 78. *The peculium of a slave.* By the Roman laws, a slave was regarded as a mere chattel, the absolute property of his master, and, as a rule, at his absolute disposal. Hence he could acquire no personal property, but it was the custom of kind masters to permit their slaves to employ their leisure hours as they pleased, and to amass property with which they might at some future day buy their freedom; this property was called "*peculium*," which, according to strict law, was the property of the master, but, according to usage, that of the slave.

NOTE I, page 80. It is stated by Sir Francis Palgrave, in his work upon the use and progress of the English commonwealth, that the country was replete with the monuments of Roman magnificence. Malmesbury appeals to the stately ruins, as testimonies of the favour Britain had enjoyed; the towers, temples, and baths, which yet remained undestroyed, excited the wonder of foreign travellers; and the edifices raised by the Romans were so costly and numerous, that in the fourteenth century their ruins excelled all others north of the Alps. Every city (such as Durocina) seems to have had its temples, basilica, amphitheatre, and other public buildings, in imitation of the mighty seat of empire in distant Italy.

It is a significant fact, that when the Emperor Constantius rebuilt the city of Autun in Gaul, at the end of the third century, he brought the workmen chiefly from Britain, which, says Eumenius, "abounded with the best artificers."

NOTE K, page 85. *The Pistrinum.* The punishments of slaves were very numerous and various; one of the mildest was to send them to work in the *pistrinum*, or mill, where corn was ground by manual labour, employed then much as the labour of horses is now employed to set machinery in motion; sometimes they were forced to carry about a piece of wood, called the *furca*, in the form of the letter A, placed over the shoulder, with the hands secured to it. Originally, the absolute power of life or death was in the hands of the master; it was modified under some of the emperors, such as Titus or Antoninus Pius, but their enactments were frequently disregarded. Runaways were branded on the forehead, or hung up by their hands with weights suspended to the feet; while rebellion frequently entailed death in the amphitheatre. In the person of Terentius the author has endeavoured to describe a master of at least average kindness.

NOTE L, page 95. *Christianity at Durocina.* Tacitus informs us that Pomponia, a British lady, and the wife of

Plautius, was addicted to a "*strange and gloomy superstition*," by which expression, in the mouth of a heathen writer, Christianity is commonly understood. Plautius probably made Durocina his head quarters, while he awaited Claudius with reinforcements for the space of several months; and it seems probable also that he remained there for some time on other occasions. In this case, perhaps, Christianity was first introduced into the city in the person of the wife of the proconsul, and subsequently, under her protection, many other converts may have been added to the Church. But no other evidence appears to exist, so that we can only indicate the *probability* of its early existence, as assumed in the text.

NOTE M, page 103. Maxentius was the son of the late Emperor Maximian, a ferocious persecutor, who had been forced to resign his empire at the bidding of his colleague, Diocletian. (See the opening of Book III. for a fuller explanation of the circumstances.)

NOTE N, page 115. A Roman altar of stone was dug up at Dorchester at the beginning of the present century, measuring three feet in height, and two feet nine inches in width, with an inscription, which may thus be rendered:—*Jovi optimo maximo et numinibus Augusti. Marcus Varus Beneficiarius Consulis Aram cum cancellis de suo posuit* (or) *Dedicavit, Sacravit, Posuit.*

NOTE O, page 132. *The Empress Helena.* The condition and the birth of this illustrious lady have been the subject of numerous disputes, but the more common tradition, which has been defended by many able antiquarians, and which is found in Geoffrey of Monmouth, assigns Colchester (Camalodunum) as the place of her birth, and royal (or noble) rank to her father. This opinion has been adopted in the text, as the more congenial to the purposes of the tale. It is also a question whether Helena or her son first professed the Christian religion. The former opinion has been adopted.

NOTE P, *sub corona*, page 142. Slaves taken in war were said to be sold "sub corona," either because they were sold by the quæstors with a chaplet (corona) on their heads (Smith, Dict. Ant.), or because the soldiers stood around them in a ring, while they were exposed for sale, as other authors assert.

NOTE Q, page 154. *The Roads in Britain.* Roman roads were thus constructed: Two shallow trenches were dug parallel to each other, marking the breadth of the proposed road, the loose earth was removed until a solid foundation was reached, and above this were laid four distinct strata, the first of small broken stones, the second of stones cemented with lime (rubble), the third of fragments of bricks or pottery, and the fourth the pavement, composed of large blocks of solid stone so joined as to present a perfectly even surface. Regular foot paths were raised on each side, and covered with gravel. Mile stones divided them accurately, mountains were pierced by cuttings or tunnels, and arches thrown over valleys or streams.

Upon these roads posting houses existed at the distance of six miles, each provided with forty horses, so that journeys of more than 150 miles were sometimes accomplished in one day.

Gibbon informs us that such communications existed from the wall of Antoninus in Caledonia even to Jerusalem (save the channel), and that the great chain of communication was drawn out to the length of 4800 miles.

After these communications were once destroyed by the devastations and neglect of the barbarian conquerors, none other so perfect existed until this age of railroads.

It will be easily seen that the journey described in the text from Durocina to Anderida was quite within the power of man at the period in question.

NOTE R, page 156. *Anderida.* Pevensey, the ancient Anderida, situated near the fashionable watering place of Eastbourne, is now quite separated from the sea by intervening low grounds, but the very walls of its ruined castle, so interesting to antiquarians, were once washed by the tide. It was one of the nine principal naval stations of the Romans, and as such was occupied by a permanent garrison of 2200 foot and 200 horse. What is known as the exterior wall of the castle was probably the wall fortifying the *castrum*, and if approached either from the east or the west, its appearance is still probably much the same as that presented to the eyes of the Romans, save that the surrounding scenery is materially altered; the forest known as "*Anderida sylva*" has completely disappeared, and the opulent villas and mansions, which must have once congregated around the fortified precincts of a large naval station, are but feebly represented by the modern village of Pevensey.

The inner fortification, or baronial castle of Pevensey, was of much later origin, and had no existence at the date of our tale.

The marvellous architecture of the Roman period is well exemplified in Pevensey; fifty generations have passed away, and yet the masonry stands firm as ever, the course of the mason's trowel marked as freshly as if the work were of yesterday.

Upon the withdrawal of the Roman forces from England, the Romanised Britons continued to hold the *castrum*, until it was taken by the Saxon Ella, the founder of the kingdom of Sussex, after a brave defence, followed by the absolute extermination of the defenders. The Saxon Chronicle says tersely,—"This year, A.D. 491, Ælla and Cissa besieged *Andredscester*, and slew all that dwelt therein, so that not a single Briton was there left."

Many coins of the period of our tale have been discovered, bearing the likeness of Constantius, the father, and Constantine the Great, the son. (See Chronicles of Pevensey, by Mark Antony Lower, M.A., F.S.A.)

NOTE S, page 189. *Intercourse of Christians.* In these early days the brotherhood in which the Faith united Christians was so thoroughly realized, that a Christian from Britain, bearing letters commendatory from his Bishop, found hospitality and a warm welcome at once in any part of the world where the Church existed, sharing in all spiritual privileges, and furnished with all that hospitality could afford; hence the position of Agathus as guest of Marcellus, who was then Bishop of Rome.

NOTE T, page 191. *The Catacombs.* The soil of the

Campagna in which Rome stands is composed of three distinct strata, the uppermost of a sandy character, much used in making cement for building purposes, the lower a hard rock, and the intermediate a combination of the two. Vast quantities of the sand were excavated, and so large passages had been made called *arenaria*, which supplied the Christians with retreats, or suggested the formation of similar ones, unknown to the world. Here they interred their dead, or excavated subterranean churches similar to the one described in the text. There are now sixty different sets of these Catacombs known to exist within three miles of the city, and it has been computed that their united length would exceed 800 miles, containing six or seven million sepulchral niches, in which the bodies of the faithful were deposited, as their relics and the inscriptions upon the slabs which closed the graves yet testify, in words of vivid Christian hope.

NOTE V, page 209. *The Cross seen by Constantine.* The authority for this marvellous vision is found in the life of Constantine, by Eusebius, who received it from the Emperor himself in the last days of his life, and, as Eusebius asserts, confirmed the testimony by an oath. The subsequent vision with which the following chapter opens is similarly attested, as also the construction of the "*Labarum*," or standard of the Cross, described in the text.

NOTE W, page 226. *End of the Persecutions.* When Constantine reached Rome, after the death of Maxentius, he published an immediate edict in favour of the Christians, thereby completely putting an end to the persecution. In the following year (313 A. D.) an edict was issued granting universal toleration, ordering that all the churches, and places taken from the Christians, should be restored without delay or charge, the loss to the holders to be satisfied from the imperial treasury. In time the endowment of the Church followed, and an imperial edict commanding the universal observance of Sunday (A. D. 321). After the defeat of Licinius had united the whole empire under the rule of Constantine, he presided in person, at Nicæa, A. D. 325, at the

First General Council of the Christian Church, wherein the Nicene Creed was compiled, and the decrees of the Council enforced by the secular power.

NOTE X, page 236. *The Stichos of the last Kiss.* This beautiful and most solemn hymn is the production of S. John Damascene, at a later date than that of our story; but the custom preceded the poem, which was but a touching embodiment of the idea previously existing. The rite was eastern, but as British Christianity had an eastern origin, and its rites differed in many particulars from the western rites introduced subsequently by S. Augustine of Canterbury, there appears little impropriety in the introduction of the rite at a British funeral. The translation is from Dr. Neale's Hymns of the Eastern Church.

NOTE Y, page 237. *The Burial of Aithne.* The reader who is familiar with the "Confessions of S. Augustine" will perhaps perceive that the funeral of his mother, S. Monica, was in the mind of the author as he described the burial of the mother of Evanus, one or two expressions being identical. It will be remembered that S. Augustine tells us of the funeral celebration at the cemetery, in words somewhat similar to those of the text. The use of incense at funerals, although not mentioned by S. Augustine, was customary in his day, as appears by the words of S. Ephrem Syrus, A.D. 378, when giving directions for his own funeral, in his last testament. And S. Ambrose also testifies (Comment. on Luc. c. 1) to its use at the celebration; while Tertullian, at an earlier date than that of our tale, A.D. 240, says—Let the Sabæans know that their goods (i.e. incense) are more freely and expensively lavished on Christian burials than on censing the gods. It may, however, be remarked, that its use was more fully established in the east than in the west.

NOTE Z, page 240. *The decline of the Roman power in Britain.* It may seem an appropriate termination to these notes, to add a few words concerning the utter destruction of the Roman civilization in our island.

It is commonly stated that the legions had performed all the military service on behalf of the Britons, who were, consequently, so unused to arms, that on the departure of the Romans, when recalled to defend the imperial city, they were utterly unable to defend themselves against Picts, Scots, and Saxons.

This is only half the truth, if it can be said to be truth at all, considering that the British youth were in the highest estimation amongst the Roman legions; but the real explanation is, that amidst the calamities which fell upon the whole Roman world, when hosts of barbarians seemed to rise out of the very earth to crush civilization, the British youth capable of bearing arms were from time to time taken from the island to fight the battles of the empire, until their own home was left defenceless.

In justification of this assertion, let it be noted, that in the year A.D. 387, Maximus, who might easily have retained Britain, rebelling against his Roman masters, after the example of Carausius, withdrew so many troops from the island to fight in Gaul that the island was left defenceless, utterly stripped of its youth and of its nobility, and the Picts and Scots entering committed fearful devastations.

Theodosius reunited the empire, and his lieutenants wholly expelled the invaders, but the withered majesty of Rome was shrouded for ever under the sway of his sons, Arcadius and Honorius, and Rome itself was taken by the Goths.

Shortly afterwards, one Constantine was chosen by the islanders to be their sovereign; he collected troops, disciplined them well, subdued the barbarians, and could he have been contented with Britain, might have preserved the Celtic kingdom here, but, like Maximus, he aimed at universal empire, and perished miserably in Gaul with the whole flower of the British youth, A.D. 411.

Honorius twice made desperate efforts to retain Britain, but in 420 the last legions were recalled, and Rome abandoned the island for ever.

From this time the historian has to grope his way in the dark; a period of fearful anarchy and civil war appears to have ensued, and the very competitors for the crown called the barbarians to their aid; famine and pestilence followed the sword, and finally the Saxons crushed the Romanised Celts, literally exterminating the larger portion.

For, as it has well been remarked, our forefathers were more savage than the partially civilised Goths or Franks;

the latter fraternised with the conquered, and combined to form the modern nations, e.g. of Spain and France; the Saxons destroyed nearly everything the other Teutons, who conquered the southern provinces, preserved; at first they destroyed even the towns they took, so that cities like Silchester (in modern Berkshire), have literally disappeared, although the very walls of that city were upwards of three miles in circumference, and it was rich in temples, basilicas, and all the monuments of Roman magnificence.

Even the English language bears witness of this fact, so small is the admixture of Celtic words.

Thus the earlier civilization was utterly swept from the face of the earth, before our own uncivilized forefathers, to be succeeded, but not till after the lapse of many ages, by a yet fairer civilisation.

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